

Oaklands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	111504
Local Authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	356927
Inspection dates	22–23 September 2010
Reporting inspector	Sonja Oyen HMI

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	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	119
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Aileen Parry
Headteacher	Mr Kevin Boyle
Date of previous school inspection	16 April 2008
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and an additional inspector. They observed 12 lessons taught by 11 members of staff and met with subject leaders, the special educational needs coordinator, the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body and members of the school council. The reporting inspector held a telephone discussion with the School Improvement Partner. The inspectors observed the work of the school, looked at students' work on display, in books and portfolios, and scrutinised school documentation including information regarding safeguarding, the tracking of students' progress and school development planning. The inspectors looked at the responses to 63 questionnaires returned by parents and carers, 15 questionnaires completed by students and 23 by members of staff.

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

- The factors that may account for students' improving achievement in science.
- How well the curriculum meets the differing needs of all students.
- How well data from the tracking of students' progress are being used to decide appropriate provision for individuals and groups.
- The effectiveness of new systems in ensuring that school improvement is focused on the right priorities.

Information about the school

Oaklands was established in the early 1970s as a school for boys and girls of secondary school age who have a statement of special educational needs, primarily for moderate learning difficulties. Some students have severe learning difficulties and/or additional medical, language and communication, social, emotional and behavioural needs. There are currently almost twice as many boys as girls. All are White British and come from differing social and economic backgrounds; 36% are known to be eligible for free school meals which is twice the national average. No student speaks English as an additional language. Seven students are in the care of a local authority. Since the re-organisation of Cheshire as a local authority, the school falls within Cheshire West and Chester but continues to take students from Cheshire East. Each day many students travel to school some considerable distance by taxi.

The school has gained many awards including Eco green flag, Healthy Schools, Sportsmark, Artsmark and Diana Princess of Wales Gold Status. It has also been re-accredited for the Inclusion Quality Mark. It is a member of the Winsford Education Partnership.

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

2

Main findings

Oaklands is living up to its catchphrase of, 'The best for all, the best from all'. Students, staff and parents and carers rightly highlight the school's close, family nature, the commitment of the staff, the drive of the headteacher and Oaklands productive links with others, including a school in Soweto. Students thrive personally and socially. A comment from a parent epitomises the views of many: 'The school has helped my child to develop into an independent, confident young man.'

Students grow in self-esteem because of the caring support of staff and peers alike and because of the wide range of experiences which often take students out into the community. As one student said, 'I love school because we do fun things.' Students are justifiably proud of their garden at the Royal Horticultural Society show at Tatton Park and of their work to gain the Eco green flag. Students achieve well overall. From often extremely low starts, they make good, and in some cases outstanding, progress. The quality of artwork often matches that of students of the same age in mainstream schools. In 2010, for the first time, some students gained a good GCSE pass (grade C) in art and in mathematics and science. When they leave at 16, all students have gained a range of national qualifications, including Duke of Edinburgh's bronze and silver awards. All move confidently into further education or employment. They are very well prepared for this next stage: they show a good team spirit and work ethic, excellent attendance records, a high awareness of how to stay safe and be healthy, and competence in using e-technology.

Oaklands is well placed to improve further. School leaders have an accurate picture of the school's strengths and areas to improve. They know its prime strength lies in the high quality of pastoral care, which ensures that students feel safe and secure. As a result they behave impeccably, are interested in learning and try hard. Since the last inspection, steps to raise academic aspirations and to refine the tracking of students' progress have had positive benefits. Students' performance in basic skills is improving, most markedly in science and mathematics. Leaders know that there is still headroom to bring out the very best in all students and current priorities reflect this. While good overall, the quality of teaching and learning varies as does the use of assessment to help students, and their parents and carers, to know how well they are doing and how they can improve. Chances are missed to provide short and longer term programmes of support and challenge tailored to individual needs, and which maximise the wide range of resources and staff expertise.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

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- Accelerate student's learning and progress, especially in English, by sharpening the use of data from assessment of students' progress to tailor provision even more closely to individual needs and to set challenging personal and academic targets that are shared with students and their parents and carers.
- Raise the quality of teaching and learning to that of the best by sharing effective practice, particularly in the use of practical experiences to consolidate and extend students' understanding, and in the use of plenary sessions and marking to identify clearly what students have learnt and what they need to do to do better next time.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**1**

Students are interested, willing learners who feel secure within the school's routines. They organise themselves well: no-one, for example, forgot to take what they needed to lessons. They are polite, help one another, and make the most of their time at school, attending lunchtime clubs and keenly participating in school events and initiatives. Year 7 students were already members of the choir, who confidently sang in unison and harmony to an audience of visitors. School councillors, elected by their peers, were planning how to canvass opinion about learning online and how the school can support Fairtrade. Older students followed instructions well on how to use spades and forks safely to clear patches of overgrown garden, and showed off the Christmas wreaths and trees they have made with pine cones to sell in a local market. Year 11 students were proud to show their portfolios of art and explained how well they were doing, and what they hoped to do on leaving Oaklands. All of the students who completed the questionnaire said they felt school prepared them well for the future; they are confident and have key life skills, including a good record of being an active member of the community.

Students leave at 16 with sound skills in the use of computers to search for information and images and to create their own text and presentations. The use of spelling checkers and other functions helps to compensate for the limited reading and writing skills of many. Not all students in Key Stages 3 and 4 make the progress they could in reading and writing. Nevertheless, many make notable strides and gain entry level awards or a pass at GCSE. Students' progress is accelerating in many subjects because of a strong focus on structured, step by step teaching rooted in practical experience. For example, Year 8 students not only had much fun in being the waves crashing on soft and hard rocks, played by others, but gained a sound appreciation of how the coastline changes when softer rock is eroded more quickly. Learning in science and in mathematics is steadily cumulative because students' work on guided investigations, see what is happening, respond to prompts to recall previous learning and acquire new terms and concepts in context.

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.

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Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	2
Taking into account: Pupils' attainment ¹	4
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	1
The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1

How effective is the provision?

Despite some areas to tighten, the many strengths of the provision account for the outstanding outcomes for students, particularly their personal development. The school is highly effective in giving students a wide range of motivating experiences. As well as days in college, workplace and residential stays, when they undertake fieldwork and outward bound type activities, students engage in differing projects linked to Winsford Partnership and Community Kidz. The strong emphasis on helping students to be literate and numerate is reflected in an increase in taught time in English without any reduction in the time given to music, art and physical education, where the students often excel. Although tracking records give a clear picture of students' academic progress, staff are not using them to optimal effect to identify where intervention and support would give individual students the boost they need to consolidate their knowledge and skills or to move on at a faster pace. The school ensures that students gain help from other agencies to meet the content of their statements of special educational needs. All staff share the responsibility for ensuring that individual students' needs are met but there is scope to refine procedures to give a clear overview of the total provision for each student. Similarly, not all home/school diaries contain students' current targets in key subjects, nor show that the school is sustaining a dialogue with parents and carers about their children's learning and experiences. These aspects detract from the otherwise excellent quality of care, guidance and support.

The school is aware that the key to getting the very best from all students is to eradicate some inconsistencies in the teaching. In the most effective lessons, the teachers and teaching assistants form a strong team sharing the role of prompting,

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drawing out students' ideas and observing how well individuals are coping. They ensure that the content is meaningful, linked as closely as possible to what students already know and understand, and is presented in bite-sized chunks with reviews and repetitions to secure new learning. Some staff, however, are a little too quick to intervene, to give the answer themselves or to gloss over what it is that will help students to improve.

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 has the full support and respect of the staff and students. He plays a central role in the life of the school, celebrating students' achievements in and outside school, and ensuring that all systems run like clockwork. Safeguarding is given top priority and procedures are highly effective, as evident in the slick operation to get students in and out of taxis before and after school. Senior staff and subject leaders contribute to the school's self-evaluation through a critical review of their areas of responsibilities, and all staff contribute to identifying the priorities for the next school year. As a result there is a common drive to improve and although staff feel that Oaklands is 'now at its best' they are keen for it to be better still. This is shared by the governing body, which has an accurate view of the school's strengths and the areas for development. In evaluating the outcomes for students, the governing body is aware that students' progress in English is too inconsistent for equality of opportunity to be judged outstanding. It also rightly judges that as half of the members of the governing body are newly appointed, training and time are needed for governance to be highly effective. Since the previous inspection, the headteacher has introduced a benchmark scorecard to summarise the school's performance. This includes some comparative data; the school has selected additional systems to trial to give an even clearer view of how the school does in relation to others. However, the high profile of the school locally and its growing involvement internationally testify to Oaklands proven success in developing students' awareness of others from different backgrounds, faiths and cultures, and thus promoting strongly community cohesion.

These are the grades for leadership and management

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

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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	2
The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures	1
The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion	1
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Views of parents and carers

The proportion of parents and carers returning the questionnaire is higher than average for special schools. Some parents and carers felt unable to respond to all the questions as their children had been at the school for a very short time. The inspectors endorse parents' and carers' high level of satisfaction in the way the school keeps their children safe, makes sure they are well prepared for the future and manages students' behaviour. A few parents and carers expressed some concern over their children's progress and how well the school took account of concerns and kept them informed. The inspectors reviewed the evidence of students' academic progress and of communication with parents and carers. They found them to be inconsistent and linked to inconsistencies in teaching, the use of assessment data and the use of home/school diaries. These inconsistencies are reflected in the areas for improvement.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted's questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Oaklands 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 63 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 119 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	40	63	21	33	0	0	1	2
The school keeps my child safe	52	83	10	16	0	0	1	2
The school informs me about my child's progress	33	52	23	37	3	5	0	0
My child is making enough progress at this school	31	49	24	38	3	5	1	2
The teaching is good at this school	42	67	15	24	2	3	1	2
The school helps me to support my child's learning	37	59	19	30	1	2	2	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	33	52	24	38	1	2	2	3
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)	34	54	23	37	3	5	0	0
The school meets my child's particular needs	37	59	19	30	6	10	0	0
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	42	67	16	25	3	5	1	2
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	29	46	27	43	2	3	3	5
The school is led and managed effectively	44	70	14	22	2	3	0	0
Overall, I am happy with my child's experience at this school	39	62	20	32	2	3	1	2

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

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	58	36	4	2
Primary schools	8	43	40	9
Secondary schools	10	35	42	13
Sixth forms	13	39	45	3
Special schools	33	42	20	4
Pupil referral units	18	40	29	12
All schools	11	42	38	9

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 are for the period 1 September 2009 to 31 March 2010 and are the most recently published data available (see www.ofsted.gov.uk). Please note that the sample of schools inspected during the autumn and spring terms 2009/10 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:	<p>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.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">■ 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.



23 September 2010

Dear Students

Inspection of Oaklands School, Winsford, CW7 1NU

Thank you for your warm welcome when Mr Alexander and I visited Oaklands to see how well you are learning. My special thanks to the school councillors who gave us much helpful information on how you gained the Eco green flag and the work that went into the wonderful garden at the Royal Horticultural Show at Tatton Park.

We agree with those of you who completed a questionnaire: that Oaklands serves you very well. The pupil resolution, which you all stated so clearly in assembly, holds true - Oaklands is safe, you do work hard and have fun! You are sensible. Everyone behaved impeccably and many of you were especially polite and thoughtful. We know some of you find change difficult but all the staff care for you well. We saw how quickly Year 7 students have settled into new routines. You do celebrate your achievements and yes, we agree that there is much to celebrate! Your creative art work, the intense concentration of the choir as they sang, your enthusiasm and willingness to learn, and your growing success in gaining awards, all help to show us that Oaklands is an outstanding school. We also agree with you, and your parents and carers, that Oaklands prepares you really well for the future.

To make sure that everything at Oaklands is 'tip top' and gets the very best from all of you, I have asked the governing body, headteacher and staff to:

- help you to learn even faster, most especially in reading and writing, by looking at the best ways to give you extra support and challenge. You can help by telling your teachers what you find particularly easy or hard.
- ensure that every lesson is the best it can be with activities, pictures and items that help you to understand new words and ideas, and with clear feedback on what you need to do to be even better. You can help by telling your teachers how you learn best! Go 4 it! (I'm sure you will have impressed the assessor.)

Yours sincerely

Sonja Øyen

Her Majesty's Inspector

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