

Oakwood Park Grammar School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	118894
Local Authority	NA
Inspection number	385464
Inspection dates	1–2 December 2011
Reporting inspector	Jacqueline White HMI

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

Type of school	Academy
School category	Foundation
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Boys
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,020
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	280
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mike Stevens
Headteacher	Kevin Moody
Date of previous school inspection	19 November 2008
School address	Oakwood Park Maidstone Kent ME16 8AH
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Age group	11–18
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Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. They observed teaching and learning in 27 sessions of the school's fortnightly enrichment programme on the first day of the inspection and 18 lessons on the second day. In total, 35 teachers were observed. The inspectors held meetings with members of the governing body, senior and middle leaders, and groups of students. They looked at the school's data on students' performance, and records of the support provided to them and of their progress. Inspectors scrutinised the school's improvement plans, policies and procedures, including health and safety and risk assessments. The inspection team analysed 99 questionnaires completed by parents and carers, 150 from students and 28 from staff.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- The quality of students' learning in lessons.
- The effectiveness of assessment practice in reducing variation in students' performance across subjects.
- The quality of provision and students' achievement in the sixth form.

Information about the school

Oakwood Park Grammar School is an average size and draws students from a wide area around Maidstone. Few students come from minority ethnic groups or speak English as an additional language. Girls are admitted to the sixth form. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities is low. Only a very small number of students are known to be eligible for free school meals. The school specialises in mathematics and computing, and applied learning. It converted to academy status in May 2011.

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 with a good and improving sixth form. It fulfils its aim of offering students 'an exceptional learning experience'. The headteacher, governors and senior leaders have established an extremely supportive ethos which enables students to achieve highly in their personal and academic development. All groups of students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, make at least good progress between Year 7 and 11 to attain well above the national average consistently in GCSE examinations. Highly effective leadership and management, accurate self-evaluation and an unswerving commitment to the success of every student underpin the school's excellent capacity for sustaining high performance and driving improvement.

Students feel absolutely safe and very well cared for. Strong and trusting relationships are an important factor in students' enjoyment of learning, their good behaviour and high attendance. Outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development underpins students' confidence and mature understanding of the wealth of difference that makes up humankind. They are reflective young people who make an exceptional contribution to the success of the school and the prosperity and well-being of the wider community.

The outstanding, well-tailored curriculum supports students' high attainment, widens their horizons and inspires them to aim high. The school's specialisms are used very effectively to enrich provision and encourage students to explore the limits of their potential. Specialism has also been a catalyst for establishing an excellent network of partnerships that not only extends students' learning experiences but enhances the leadership skills of staff too.

Teaching is mostly good across all subjects with some that is outstanding. The best teaching ensures students have a detailed understanding of how to improve their work, secures their immediate engagement in challenging learning activities, probes and pushes their understanding through excellent questioning and requires them to apply and lead learning. Some teachers are still developing these high level skills.

The school's surveys of parents and carers views show overwhelming support for the school. Even though the return was low, the inspection questionnaire, confirmed parents' and carers' strong support and appreciation of the school. Inspectors found the school strives hard and successfully to develop students as well-rounded individuals with the skills and values which will enable them to sustain lifelong

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learning and be caring and responsible citizens. A comment from one parent sums this up: 'Oakwood strikes the balance between academic study and wider achievement, and, because of this, my son loves school and can't wait to join the sixth form.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Increase the proportion of outstanding teaching by continuing to share and model the very best practice. Give emphasis to:
 - starting lessons with learning activities that engage students quickly, capture their interest and challenge their intellect
 - probing questioning which pushes students to exercise higher order thinking skills
 - the creation of opportunities for students to lead learning
 - ensuring students have a detailed, subject-specific understanding of how to improve their work.

Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils

1

The selective nature of the school means that boys' prior attainment on entry is well above average. They make at least good progress to secure high attainment in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in each year group is small, their needs are very well met and consequently their attainment is equally high. Overall, students' achievement is outstanding.

Most students demonstrate very positive attitudes to school life because they appreciate, and benefit from, the interest their teachers take in them. Students say they feel totally confident in the effectiveness of the school in helping them overcome any personal problems. They have numerous opportunities throughout their daily lessons and tutor time to discuss and reflect on issues relating to human existence, ethics, faith and belief, and many contemporary world issues. Consequently, they value difference and express their individuality and a strong sense of social responsibility. Discussions with students, and their responses to the questionnaire, show the overwhelming majority exhibit highly effective awareness of risks and dangers, including e-safety and the use of social media.

Learning was good or better in the very large majority of lessons observed during the inspection. Most students are interested, diligent learners. In the best lessons, they revel in the challenging tasks they are set and engage wholeheartedly with opportunities to lead learning and evaluate the quality of their own and other's work. Students' future economic well-being is greatly enhanced by their high attainment in English and mathematics, their confident application of basic skills and adherence to the values of determination, perseverance and teamwork.

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These are the grades for pupils' outcomes

Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning	1
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment ¹	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	2
The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles	2
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?

Most of the teaching seen during the inspection was good, with some that was outstanding. In the best lessons, teachers use their strong subject knowledge as a foundation for clear explanations and instructions. They elicit thoughtful and exploratory comments from students with probing questions that push them to think more deeply and develop their responses further. Regular checks on understanding relate the lesson to assessment criteria so that students can evaluate their progress towards their target levels and grades. Well-structured group and pair work enables students to articulate their thinking. For example, in one history lesson observed, every student assumed the role of a citizen in cold war Berlin. They were either supporting communism or capitalism and had to expound their views in a café discussion. This challenging task required students to apply and deepen their previous understanding. They enjoyed the activity and made excellent progress.

Teaching is less successful where too much teacher direction and explanation reduce the level of challenge for students and dampen their engagement. As a result, some, especially the most able, may not explore their full potential in the lesson. Sometimes a single task or approach for the whole group limits progress and pace.

The curriculum is imaginative, with the flexibility to meet the needs of individuals. Students' interests and aptitudes are well catered for by the wide range of subjects offered. Cross-curricular and extended projects delivered through the school's

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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enrichment programme increase relevance and demonstrate the links between subjects. The great variety of extra-curricular activities is valued very much by students. The high quality of care, guidance and support is a strength of the school. Staff know students as individuals and enable them to make the best of the extensive opportunities that are offered. Transition arrangements, particularly on entry to the school, are well thought through, mindful of potential stress and support successful outcomes for students. One parent wrote, 'The move from primary school has been managed extremely well, and, as a result, my son settled very quickly and has already developed a strong sense of belonging.'

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 and senior leaders have high expectations of themselves and every member of the school community. They work together cohesively to sustain a shared vision of success for every student. The school's excellent practice and application of the principles of equality of opportunity ensure students have the best chance of a secure future. Discrimination in any form is not tolerated. Staff morale is high. All those who returned their questionnaire indicated they are proud of the school and know what it is trying to achieve. Most feel their individual and collective contributions are valued; this leads to the very effective teamwork which underpins the school's drive for continued improvement. The quality of teaching and learning is central to this drive and monitored rigorously. Middle leaders are very involved in the process and, as a team, are a considerable and highly committed force for improvement. The use of assessment to support learning has been a particular focus in monitoring and continuous professional development. The impact of this work is evident in decreasing variation in students' performance across subjects.

The governing body works closely with senior leaders to support and challenge the school well. The complementary mix of skills and knowledge shared by governors is put to good use in analysing the effectiveness of the school and shaping its strategic direction. Governors successfully ensure student safety and that all current safeguarding requirements are met and thoroughly checked.

The school acknowledges that it needs to develop a more strategic approach to promoting community cohesion. Nevertheless, it makes a good contribution. It knows its context well and has established community links that make a valuable

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contribution to the prosperity and well-being of the wider locality. International links are fostered through sport and through the school’s involvement with the Comenius programme which promotes partnerships between schools across Europe. Oakwood is partnered with a school in Germany, and together, they are taking forward a project to raise awareness of environmental issues and the importance of recycling.

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
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	2
The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money	1

Sixth form

As a result of outstanding leadership, outcomes in the sixth form are improving and students make good progress from their starting points, including the girls. Provisional data show the school achieved its best ever sixth form results in 2011 with the percentage of students achieving A* to B grades in A-level courses rising above the average for all grammar schools. However, there is still some variation in performance across subjects. This is being tackled by rigorous monitoring and a very thorough evaluation of outcomes for students.

Students enjoy sixth form life. This is reflected in their good attendance and punctuality. They greatly value the warmth of their relationships with their teachers and appreciate their willingness ‘to go the extra mile’ to support them personally and academically. Highly individualised care, guidance and support are fundamental to the sixth form’s positive ethos. Students reciprocate by being admirable role models for younger students and making an excellent contribution to the school. As prefects, they take responsibility for many day-to-day duties that add to the smooth running of the school. They also have leadership roles within the school council and house system. Many become involved in peer mentoring projects and work with primary children in local schools.

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Most of the teaching seen in the sixth form was good. A strong focus on effective assessment is driving its improvement. The curriculum is constantly under review and developments ensure that it meets students’ needs. For example, drama, business studies and pre-university qualifications in some subjects are recent additions that have increased both breadth and challenge in provision.

These are the grades for the sixth form

Overall effectiveness of the sixth form	2
Taking into account:	2
Outcomes for students in the sixth form	2
The quality of provision in the sixth form	2
Leadership and management of the sixth form	1

Views of parents and carers

The school was disappointed by the below average response to the questionnaire. However, most of the parents and carers who did return their questionnaires were highly supportive of the school and agreed that their children enjoy attending. A few parents and carers felt that the school does not listen carefully enough to their suggestions and concerns and could do more to help them support their children’s learning. Leaders and managers valued this feedback and expressed determination to ensure that all parents and carers feel listened to and supported. Inspection evidence showed that the school has a wide range of ways in which parents and carers can communicate with the school. There were also many examples of how the school had worked together with parents and carers in support of students’ learning.

Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Oakwood Park Grammar 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 99 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,020 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	52	53	43	43	2	2	2	2
The school keeps my child safe	55	56	39	39	1	1	3	3
The school informs me about my child’s progress	64	65	30	30	3	3	2	2
My child is making enough progress at this school	54	55	34	34	8	8	2	2
The teaching is good at this school	45	45	44	44	6	6	1	1
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	43	43	40	40	11	11	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	29	29	57	58	8	8	1	1
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)	46	46	32	32	5	5	2	2
The school meets my child’s particular needs	48	48	39	39	5	5	3	3
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	49	49	36	36	8	8	3	3
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	28	28	48	48	6	6	8	8
The school is led and managed effectively	50	51	34	34	4	4	6	6
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	60	61	33	33	2	2	2	2

Glossary

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.
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	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

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 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 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.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

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 pupils' 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.



5 December 2011

Dear Students

Inspection of Oakwood Park Grammar School, Maidstone ME16 8AH

Thank you very much for making the inspection team so welcome when we visited your school recently. We were impressed by your courtesy, helpfulness and the great pride that you take in the school. These are our main findings.

- Yours is an outstanding school where you feel absolutely safe and very well cared for.
- Your high attendance, outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, good behaviour and good teaching and learning combine to ensure you achieve highly.
- You make an outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community.
- The school works exceptionally well with other organisations to enhance your learning experiences and personal development.
- The curriculum meets your needs extremely well and you appreciate the great variety of clubs and activities available.
- In the good and improving sixth form, attainment is rising, students enjoy their studies and are admirable role models for younger students.
- Leaders and managers are doing an excellent job in running the school and know its strengths and areas for development very well.

The school's leaders are ambitious. They want to build on its success and ensure you explore the very limits of your potential. We worked together to consider the priorities for improvement. These include increasing the proportion of outstanding teaching, giving emphasis to some strategies that will stretch you even further. You can help by welcoming opportunities to lead learning in lessons.

Thank you again for your help during the inspection. We hope you continue to enjoy school life and wish you all every future success.

Yours sincerely

Jacqueline White
Her Majesty's Inspector

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