

Oakfields Education Unit

Inspection report

Unique reference number	135432
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	381884
Inspection dates	10–11 July 2012
Lead inspector	Jon Carter

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	12–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	18
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Julia Coles
Date of previous school inspection	19 March 2009
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Introduction

Inspection team

Jon Carter

Additional inspector

This inspection was carried out with two days' notice. The inspector observed teaching and learning in six lessons taught by two teachers and made visits to other learning activities. Meetings were held with a representative from the management committee, the two consultants responsible for students' health care and members of staff at the school. Telephone discussions were held with a representative from the local authority and the Chair of the Management Committee. Students were consulted informally during the inspection. The inspector observed the unit's work, and looked at safeguarding arrangements, lesson planning documents, minutes of management committee meetings, the headteacher's analysis of students' progress, records of lesson monitoring and the school's self-evaluation. He also analysed responses from the one questionnaire received from a parent/carer, as well as those from 12 students and eight staff.

Information about the school

Oakfields Education Unit is a small pupil referral unit for students with medical needs located in the Woodland House Kent and Medway Adolescent Unit. The proportion of students who join or leave the unit during the school year is high; the average length of stay at the unit is six weeks. Consequently, the proportions of boys and girls on roll fluctuates; there are often more girls than boys. The unit makes provision for students who cannot attend school due to their mental health needs although all students also remain on roll at their referring school. Students' time in the unit is equally split between therapy, provided by health authority staff, and education. Students of different ages are taught together. Almost all students are from White British backgrounds. No students are known to be eligible for free school meals.

Since the previous inspection, the unit has moved location and changed name due to a change in the health authority partner. It now has a remit to cover the whole of Kent and Medway where previously it was a West Kent service. Placements are for much shorter periods than before.

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	2
Achievement of pupils	2
Quality of teaching	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	2
Leadership and management	2

Key findings

- This is a good pupil referral unit. It is not yet outstanding because the quality of teaching is not consistently outstanding and systems for tracking students' progress have not been adapted to measure students' achievements most effectively now that referrals are much shorter than before.
- Students make good progress during their placements. Those studying examination courses at their mainstream schools continue their learning well because there is close liaison between unit and school staff. Younger students accelerate their progress in reading, writing and communication through focused tasks. A few older students not in statutory education sometimes make only satisfactory progress because their work is too easy.
- Teaching is good. Learning objectives are usually highly personalised for individual students and take good account of assessment of their prior learning. Occasionally students are less well challenged. This prevents them from making rapid progress over a sustained period. Students are often given suitable opportunities to work independently. However, some teaching assistants are less effective in actively promoting students' independent learning skills.
- Students' engagement with learning is often good and they behave well in the classrooms. They are clear that bullying is not an issue within the unit. While most students attend education regularly and routinely, a few occasionally choose not to attend lessons. This slows the progress they make.
- The headteacher ensures, through excellent communication, that school staff and health authority personnel work effectively together to meet students' needs. Systems for tracking students' progress have not evolved sufficiently, following the recent relocation and change of remit, to ensure that the small steps of progress made during students' short stays are measured accurately and analysed meaningfully. This is also evident in the monitoring of teaching which, while accurate, is not always well focused on students' progress.

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What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching so that it is outstanding in a greater proportion of lessons, by ensuring that:
 - students, particularly those who are not of statutory school age, are always set learning activities that challenge them to make rapid and sustained progress
 - teaching assistants actively promote students' independent learning skills.
- Improve the unit's progress tracking systems so that teachers, senior leaders and the management committee can monitor the impact of teaching on outcomes for students, by ensuring that:
 - students' progress is measured against learning objectives and regularly evaluated by teachers
 - monitoring of the quality of teaching by senior leaders focuses on progress made against learning objectives
 - tracking data are regularly analysed by senior leaders and reviewed by the management committee.

Main report

Achievement of pupils

Students join the unit following their admission to Woodland House with a very broad range of prior attainment. During the inspection, for example, students on roll ranged from being four years behind their chronological age in English to those currently studying for GCE A-level examinations.

Both boys and girls make good progress in lessons so that, over the short periods they are on roll at Oakfields, they improve their basic skills and successfully continue their learning in the subjects they are studying at their mainstream schools and colleges. There is an appropriate focus on the core subjects of mathematics, English and science during the restricted time students have access to education due to the medical treatment they also receive during their stay. This enables students, especially those who have additional special educational needs due to literacy difficulties, to make good progress in their reading, writing, communication and numeracy skills. Students often make good use of information and communication technology to complete their work, demonstrating their good levels of competence in using a range of software that is appropriate to the task they have been set.

Students also learn well in creative and expressive subjects. They often enjoy participating in lessons such as art and drama and produce artefacts of good quality. The flexibility of the classroom arrangements enables staff to respond positively to students' requests to continue this work outside the normal timetable as they find it therapeutic and it supports improvements in their mental health.

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Tracking and feedback records show that many students successfully complete GCSE and A-level examinations after reintegration to their mainstream school. This demonstrates that the unit is successful in maintaining students' engagement in education and ensures that they miss the smallest amount of education possible while receiving treatment for their medical conditions. The unit's own records of feedback show that this is particularly appreciated by parents and carers.

Quality of teaching

Lesson planning takes good account of students' prior attainment because information from baseline tests and school assessments is used to accurately establish what they already know and can do. The objectives for each lesson's learning are usually highly personalised to individual students' needs. These are often reviewed at the end of a session so that students can demonstrate that they have made progress in specific skills, knowledge and understanding. For example, in a science lesson for a Year 10 student, questions related to the learning objective enabled the teacher to skilfully elicit from the student their newly acquired knowledge about how stem cells can repair and regenerate the body. This lesson also provided a good example of how teaching stimulates students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well; the student was fascinated by the way these processes enable newts to regrow lost limbs.

Occasionally, a few students make only satisfactory progress in lessons because the level of challenge is too low and work is not personalised as comprehensively as it is for other students. Where this happens, it most often involves students who are not of statutory school age and who attend the education unit voluntarily.

Although all students have special educational needs by virtue of the fact that their education is affected by their mental health needs, teachers also ensure that students' additional learning needs are addressed through their personalisation of learning for each student. For example, a Year 8 student moved forward well in his reading and writing skills through structured use of a focused task about capital letters and punctuation followed by a learning activity that enabled him to put those skills into practice.

Students' work is often marked by the teachers from their mainstream school who have set the tasks. This usually provides good quality, specialised written feedback about what the student needs to focus on to improve or the next steps the student needs to take in learning. Unit staff often work closely with students and provide them with good quality verbal feedback. However, this method of working means that there is not always a written record available for the student to refer to and this limits opportunities for students to develop independent learning skills. This issue is exacerbated because, while some teaching assistants are skilled at recognising opportunities for students to work independently, others spend too long sitting with students and helping them too much with all aspects of their work.

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While only a single response was received from parents and carers to the inspection questionnaire, this was extremely positive about the quality of teaching. The unit regularly receives feedback from parents and carers in response to its own questionnaire and this is equally positive.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Students typically demonstrate good attitudes to learning and behave well in the unit. They are tolerant of the regular change that happens due to admission of new students to the unit and the subsequent discharges at the end of treatment at the unit. Relationships between staff and students are strong and trusting. Students feel safe in the unit, appreciate the care and respect they are shown and respond accordingly.

Students are clear that the unit's strategies and procedures ensure that bullying including, for example, prejudice-based incidents and cyber bullying, is infrequent and dealt with appropriately should it occur. The unit maintains extremely comprehensive records of students' behaviour and shares these with the health authority staff so that there is continuity between the unit and the wards. These records and discussions show that behaviour is good over time. Parents and carers do not raise any concerns about students' behaviour and are clear that the unit keeps their children safe.

Most students engage well with the education unit and attend the lessons on their timetable diligently. The nature of students' illnesses sometimes precludes them from being in an appropriate condition to attend education. On occasions, however, students make the choice not to attend without having a genuine reason for being absent. This issue has been identified by the headteacher as an area that requires improvement and plans are in place to make changes that should have a positive impact on reducing inappropriate absence.

Leadership and management

The headteacher, as the sole senior leader, sets a clear direction and appropriate routines and expectations for the unit's staff. This ensures that communication between all stakeholders, including health authority staff, unit staff, schools, parents and carers, is very effective in promoting students' safety, well-being and sustained educational progress. Partnerships are exceptionally strong as a result of this high quality communication. They are further enhanced by the very successful work of the unit's dedicated reintegration staff. The support that is provided within the unit and in the students' mainstream schools by this part of the team has led to the successful reintegration of 98% of students back to school, college or other appropriate educational provision.

Arrangements for safeguarding students meet current requirements, for example through recruitment checks and regular staff training, as well as established systems for access control and the supervision of visitors. Training has helped to make sure

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that students who have learning needs as well as medical conditions receive additional support from staff who understand how best to address their needs. Each student has a personalised curriculum based on their unique educational circumstances which ensures that the unit is successful in tackling discrimination and promotes equality well. The unit ensures that its overall curriculum is broad and balanced and provides an appropriate range of learning experiences that are both practical and academic. While activities that are run by the health authority team, for example cooking, also contribute to the unit's overall curriculum provision and to the development of students' social skills, no formal joint audit has been carried out to ascertain the extent to which this enhances the formal curriculum offered by the unit.

The unit's strong capacity to improve is demonstrated by the successful maintenance of good standards of education despite a significant relocation and change of remit since the previous inspection. The headteacher and her staff have ensured that they have adapted almost all of their systems to suit students whose mental health needs are more acute and who stay for much shorter periods of time. Accurate data from regular observation enable the headteacher to make an accurate evaluation of students' development in engagement and well-being. However, while progress tracking systems are in place, they are not yet measuring small enough steps of progress. Consequently, the management committee does not always have sufficient information to monitor students' progress rigorously. Teachers routinely evaluate students' participation in lessons but do not make best use of the highly personalised learning objectives they set to measure and track students' progress. Monitoring of the quality of teaching is generally robust but does not consistently refer to the progress students make towards meeting each lesson's learning objectives.

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	54	42	2	2
Primary schools	14	49	32	6
Secondary schools	20	39	34	7
Special schools	33	45	20	3
Pupil referral units	9	55	28	8
All schools	16	47	31	6

New school inspection arrangements have been introduced from 1 January 2012. This means that inspectors make judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September to 31 December 2011 and represent judgements that were made under the school inspection arrangements that were introduced on 1 September 2009. These data 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.

Primary schools include primary academy converters. Secondary schools include secondary academy converters, sponsor-led academies and city technology colleges. Special schools include special academy converters and non-maintained special schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning and development taking account of their attainment.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Attendance:	the regular attendance of pupils at school and in lessons, taking into account the school's efforts to encourage good attendance.
Behaviour:	how well pupils behave in lessons, with emphasis on their attitude to learning. Pupils' punctuality to lessons and their conduct around the school.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving based on its self-evaluation and what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Floor standards:	the national minimum expectation of attainment and progression measures.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the governors and 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.
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.
Safety:	how safe pupils are in school, including in lessons; and their understanding of risks. Pupils' freedom from bullying and harassment. How well the school promotes safety, for example e-learning.

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.



11 July 2012

Dear Students

Inspection of Oakfields Education Unit, Staplehurst TN12 0ER

Thank you for welcoming me when I inspected the unit recently. It was good to see so many of you engaged with continuing your education while at Woodland House and talk with you about your work.

Oakfields is a good pupil referral unit where students make good progress. Those who are studying for examinations at their mainstream schools continue their learning well. Younger students make good progress in their basic skills. Sometimes, older students only make satisfactory progress because the work is not hard enough for them. Teaching is good at the unit. Teachers usually make sure that learning objectives are highly personalised for individual students and take good account of what they already know. Students do get opportunities to work independently but sometimes teaching assistants could do more to actively promote independent learning skills. Students' engagement with learning is often good and behaviour is good in class. You told me that bullying is not an issue at the unit. While most students attend education as they should, a few do not and this affects how quickly they make progress. The unit is well led by the headteacher and there is excellent communication between staff, schools and students' parents and carers.

I have asked the headteacher to focus on the following to help the unit provide a better education for its students.

- Improve the quality of teaching so all students get appropriately challenging work and have enough opportunities to work independently.
- Improve the unit's tracking systems so that teachers and leaders can measure the small steps of progress students make during their short stays.

You can all help by attending all the classes you are timetabled to go to in the unit.

Yours sincerely

Jon Carter
Lead inspector

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