

Oaklands School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	100972
Local Authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	307546
Inspection date	18 September 2007
Reporting inspector	David Hornbrook HMI

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

Type of school	Comprehensive
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	586
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Sherratt
Headteacher	Patrice Canavan
Date of previous school inspection	13 October 2003
School address	Old Bethnal Green Road Bethnal Green London E2 6PR
Telephone number	020 7613 1014
Fax number	020 7729 3756

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. During a one-day visit, the inspector evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: the extent of the improvement in results as represented in 2007 performance data, the effectiveness of measures to raise the achievement of high attaining students, and the judgements given by the school for personal development and well-being, the curriculum and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from the school's self-evaluation, published test and examination results, policies, minutes and other school documentation, observation of the school at work, interviews with staff and students, and parental and student questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments, as given in its self-evaluation form, were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Oaklands School is a small, inner-London secondary school in an area of high-density housing with many socially disadvantaged families; over half the students are eligible for free school meals. A large majority of students are from minority ethnic groups and the most of these speak English as an additional language. The number of students with learning difficulties is well above the national average. There are more boys in the school than girls. The school has specialist science status, is an extended school and is an approved International School.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

Oaklands is an outstanding school. The headteacher ably leads an effective senior team with openness, insight and clarity of purpose. Senior and middle leaders understand the school's potential and have developed an exciting vision of the future. A powerful commitment to learning and achievement, which permeates the culture of the school, is matched by a strong focus on support for individual students, particularly if they are identified as falling behind. 'Teachers give us lots of individual care and support,' remarked one student. As a result, students achieve outstandingly well, are happy at school and show confidence in the future. As one teacher said, 'Our aim is that students are happy and fulfilled'. Parents are very positive about the school. Typical of comments received by inspectors were: 'Oaklands has been such a fantastic choice' and, 'Oaklands is one of the best schools in Tower Hamlets'.

Students join the school with below normal levels of attainment; when they leave, they have GCSE results above the national average and well above the average for schools in Tower Hamlets. In 2007, 56% of students achieved five or more GCSEs at grades A* to C including English and Mathematics; in 2006, the progress made by students from Year 7 to Year 11 put Oaklands in the top 3% of schools nationally. Students do particularly well in Years 10 and 11. The school is aware of some blemishes on this otherwise impressive record. For example, the most able students and those requiring school action do not perform quite as well as they might. However, overall, standards are climbing steadily with Bangladeshi students making particularly good progress and no group of students significantly underperforming.

Behaviour in classrooms and circulation areas is excellent and attendance is above average and improving. Students speak very highly of the additional activities organised by the school, not least those designed to help them with their work. 'We have writing classes, coursework classes and study support,' one student reported. 'My daughter finds the "study support" sessions after school very useful, and these help her to keep up to date with her coursework,' said one parent. Students also benefit from the wide use made of external facilities to provide recreational activities. They are aware of the need to keep healthy and they join in the many sporting activities organised by the school. They feel safe; rare incidents of bullying and racism are dealt with effectively.

Students' spiritual development is sound and their social, moral and cultural education is outstanding. Visits to continental Europe and China support the school's international status and there are impressive opportunities for students to take on responsibilities within the school and beyond it. For example, students can become 'ambassadors' representing the school very well on formal occasions. A recently expanded programme of work experience is valued by students and very few fail to enter employment, education or training when they leave. Not least, students rightly see themselves as part of an inclusive ethos in which debate is encouraged and their ideas valued. As one parent put it, 'Oaklands does not just speak about consultation - it actually does it.'

The school has developed a number of productive external partnerships. A creative relationship with a large City bank has provided mentoring and given students access on occasions to high quality facilities in Canary Wharf. At the same time, a successful Saturday school fosters links with local primary schools and gives students the opportunity to extend their studies, for example through an online mathematics project.

Forced by its small site to be inventive, the school has developed an innovative and flexible curriculum, which again makes outstanding use of its links with external partners and imaginatively exploits the potential of out-of-hours teaching. Restricted design technology facilities have been supplemented by a food technology course in a local college; GCSE music, not viable during the day, is offered to a small group of students after school. The school's new international status has brought a strong emphasis on languages. Students may study two languages in Years 7 to 9 and three in Year 10 and 11, and there are clubs for French, Spanish, Bengali, Japanese, Italian and Mandarin. Following the last inspection, action has been taken to improve homework and there is a continuing expansion of options for students in Years 10 and 11, particularly in the vocational area.

The school's review and evaluation of its performance are very thorough and lead to brisk and effective action resulting in tangible improvement. For example, previous weaknesses in mathematics have been systematically and successfully tackled. Very good use is also made of well-targeted, external evaluation and support. A number of measures have been put in place to offer more challenge to higher attaining students. Some are now able to take some GCSE examinations early and students are grouped by ability in mathematics, science and modern foreign languages.

Teaching is good and highly rated by students and their parents. As one parent commented, 'The teachers are superb and we cannot praise them enough.' Lessons are well-ordered, stimulating and harmonious, and, where appropriate, teachers are conscientious in providing material carefully targeted at examination requirements. While students are happy to respond to questions, they are not always given enough chance to talk at length about their thoughts, ideas and feelings. The school acknowledges that the extent to which teachers plan for the full range of ability in their lessons remains variable and that the full potential of information and communication technology (ICT) in the classroom has not yet been realised.

What the school should do to improve further

- Improve the performance of the most able students.
- Ensure teachers offer suitable challenges for the full range of ability in their classes, and make better use of classroom ICT resources to engage students in learning.

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Annex A

Inspection judgements

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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Overall effectiveness

How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?	1
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	Yes
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well-being?	1
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	1

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	1
The standards ¹ reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and disabilities make progress	2

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
How well learners enjoy their education	1
The attendance of learners	2
The behaviour of learners	1
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	1
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	1
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	1

¹ Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	1
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	1
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	1
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	1
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	1
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	1
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

10 October 2007

Dear Students

Inspection of Oaklands School, London, E2 6PR

I am writing to let you know the judgements made about your school. I very much enjoyed meeting some of you, talking to your teachers and visiting lessons. Your views are very important and helped me to understand your school. In the end, I thought that Oaklands School is providing you with an outstanding education. I was particularly impressed with:

- * all the extra things you can do at Oaklands, like your overseas visits - I wasn't at all surprised to hear that you enjoy coming to school!
- * your maturity and excellent behaviour
- * your examination results - you do much better at GCSE than other local schools
- * the way you take on lots of responsibilities
- * your positive attitude to school - you really want to do as well as you can
- * your headteacher and all her staff - they work extremely hard to help you do as well as possible.

To make it even better I think your teachers need to make sure that all of you are equally challenged in lessons and that the new electronic white boards are really 'interactive'.

Thank you for taking part in the inspection by talking to me about your work and your life in school. I was very impressed by your mature and reflective views.

David Hornbrook

Her Majesty's Inspector of Schools