

The Orchard School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	119058
Local Authority	Kent
Inspection number	319494
Inspection date	30 September 2008
Reporting inspector	Jeffery Plumb

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 on roll	
School (total)	57
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mark Everett
Headteacher	Nikki Mason
Date of previous school inspection	4 July 2007
School address	Cambridge Road Canterbury CT1 3QQ
Telephone number	01227 769220
Fax number	01227 781589

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Introduction

The Orchard School was inspected in July 2007, and was given a Notice to Improve. The school was asked to address issues related to providing students with challenging and interesting activities that raise their quality of learning, improving their attendance and ensuring consistent staff expectations of their behaviour, implementing procedures for assessing students' work accurately and sharing this information with them to show what they need to do to improve, and raising student achievement. Subsequently, an inspector visited the school to monitor its progress. This inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors.

Description of the school

At the time of the inspection, the school is in a stage of transition from providing for secondary-aged students with moderate learning difficulties to one which caters for students with complex behavioural and learning difficulties. Year 11 students who left in the summer of 2008 were the last significant cohort of students with moderate learning difficulties. Although now designated as an all-age school for students with behavioural and complex needs, there were no primary-aged children on roll at the time of the inspection. The secondary premises are undergoing redevelopment, but there is not space to enlarge the building and so the primary department is under development on a nearby site and is not yet complete. The school became a specialist arts college in September 2005. The headteacher, deputy headteacher and assistant headteacher have all taken up their posts since September 2006. A major building programme is ongoing and the school functions partially in temporary huts on a building site. The school has a large catchment area, with some students travelling exceptionally long distances. The vast majority of students are boys, with only four girls, all in Year 11. All of the students have a White British heritage. There are three students in public care. The proportion of students eligible for a free school meal is significantly above the national average. All students have a statement of special educational needs. A few students are in the school awaiting the local authority finding more suitable provision for them. The school has achieved the Arts Mark Silver and Gold Awards and the Sportsmark Award.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

The Orchard School provides a satisfactory education for its students. It has made significant improvements in the key areas identified as weaknesses at the time of its last inspection. In accordance with section 13 (5) of the Education Act 2005, HMCI is of the opinion that the school no longer requires significant improvement.

While students' standards are below average, their achievement is satisfactory. The vast majority of students enter the school with significant gaps in their education. Overall, the school uses assessment data well to set social and academic targets for students and track their progress over time. However, a few teachers do not make sufficient use of the assessment of students in their planning. Behaviour is satisfactory. There is a good behaviour policy. The number of instances of serious misbehaviour has reduced significantly since the last inspection, but the policy remains inconsistent in its application. The headteacher gives a clear direction to the school, and strategies to raise achievement in English and mathematics have been successful. However, the very poor attendance of a small number of students, some of whom are educated at this school whilst waiting to be appropriately placed in a school to meet their very complex needs, has an adverse impact on their achievement. A particular success story is the very significant drop in the number of students who truant from lessons since the last inspection. This reflects the fact that overall, the curriculum interests them and that the quality of teaching has improved. College courses available for Key Stage 4 students were put in place to meet the needs of students with moderate learning difficulties and do not provide sufficient challenge for cognitively more able students with complex emotional and behavioural difficulties. The headteacher is reviewing this issue. Teaching is satisfactory and improving. For the most part, students who were previously switched off learning engage productively. However, a very small amount of teaching is dull and this lack of sparkle contributes to some students showing challenging behaviour.

Overall, students' personal development is satisfactory, but there are good aspects. The school successfully encourages students to adopt healthy and safe lifestyles, and the involvement of students in a range of enterprise projects develops their work-related skills well. Overall, care, guidance and support are satisfactory. The careers support that students receive is a strong feature and supports them well in finding suitable courses at further education colleges when they leave school.

The headteacher, with resilience and determination, is successful in equipping and supporting the majority of teachers used to teaching students with moderate learning difficulties to move forward into a new phase of providing for students with very challenging behaviours. She has achieved this whilst operating from a building site, out of a series of cabins. This is no mean achievement. Governors are beginning to balance challenge with support, evidenced by their recent robust probing into the causes of poor attendance by a few students. In a short space of time, the leadership team has successfully managed change and raised achievement. The local authority supports the school well and the capacity for further improvement is satisfactory. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school should do to improve further

- Use assessment data more consistently to inform planning and raise achievement.
- Ensure that all teachers apply the school's behaviour policy.

- Widen the range of college courses available to Key Stage 4 students to provide them with greater challenge.

A small proportion of the schools where overall effectiveness is judged satisfactory but which have areas of underperformance will receive a monitoring visit by an Ofsted inspector before their next section 5 inspection.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 3

Achievement is satisfactory. Students make satisfactory progress in English and mathematics. Standards overall are below the national average because students enter the school with significant gaps in their learning. Students have low self-esteem when they enter and have little or no interest in learning. Through an interesting curriculum, the school re-engages the majority of students with learning and this is a significant achievement. The majority of students gain in confidence. Their behaviour improves and they acquire the skills and values needed to access the National Curriculum. However, chronic poor attendance impedes the progress of a small hard core of students. Achievement and accreditation in vocational courses for Year 11 students is constrained because they only access a very limited range of college courses. The vast majority of students in public care achieve their targets, as do the very small number of girls in the school.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 3

Overall, students enjoy their learning and have positive attitudes to school. When challenged by interesting activities, they often become very enthusiastic about learning. Students' behaviour is very challenging, but the majority learn self-control and develop strategies to manage their behaviour. Overall, behaviour is satisfactory. However, on occasions, students display very volatile behaviour. Attendance is satisfactory. Governors and the leadership team constantly explore ways of improving the attendance of the few persistent non-attenders. Students' understanding of healthy and safe lifestyles is good. There is a strong and successful emphasis on improving students' emotional health. Students' work-related skills are well developed by the school's use of exciting off-site activities. For example, Key Stage 3 students learn how to manage a business through their experience of working in a milkshake bar in the town centre. Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 3

Teaching and learning are satisfactory, but improving. In the vast majority of lessons, learning is relevant for students because teachers effectively plan activities to meet their needs. In these lessons, teachers meticulously record students' progress and they use this information well to plan for students next steps of learning. On these occasions, students engage with learning, rise to the challenge and enjoy the activities, which are fun. They make at least satisfactory progress. However, a few lessons fail to engage students either because the activities are too easy or too difficult for them. Consequently, students lose interest and become bored. For the most part, teachers and teaching assistants manage poor behaviour effectively. Occasionally a few teachers do not consistently implement the school's behaviour policy and this has an

adverse impact. Teachers do not make sufficient use of assessment of what students know and can do in their planning of these lessons.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 3

Overall, the curriculum is satisfactory. There are some good features. A creative arts programme and an exciting sports programme grasp students' interest and motivates them as learners. Speech therapy is integral to the curriculum and supports students very well in acquiring the communication skills they need to cope in their day-to-day lives. The strong focus on developing life skills benefits students, particularly the strong curriculum focus on reading. Involvement in community activities such as when Key Stage 4 students manage a budget in organising a 'tea dance' for senior citizens, develop students' mathematical skills. The school makes good use of after-school clubs and visits to enhance students' enjoyment in learning. However, the range of vocational courses for Key Stage 4 students available at college is too narrow and insufficiently challenging.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 3

Care, guidance and support are satisfactory. Child protection procedures are robust and meet government guidelines. Risk assessments, including of student behaviours, are thorough and detailed. Links with external agencies are satisfactory. However, the very wide geographical area served by the school causes difficulties in consistency of support. For example, different external departments of the Child Adolescent and Mental Health Service support students with mental health difficulties because students live so far apart from each other. External careers support is good and students in their leaving year receive good support in securing relevant further college courses. The school spends quality time assessing students' confidence, self-esteem and anger difficulties on entry to the school. It uses information from these assessments well to build students' confidence and so equip them to acquire the values required to access the national curriculum. The school tests students' competencies in English and mathematics when they enter the school. It uses findings from these test results to set students' challenging targets to raise their achievement. However, students are not sufficiently involved in setting these targets and not all teachers use these targets effectively in their planning to raise student achievement.

Leadership and management

Grade: 3

Leadership and management are satisfactory and improving. The headteacher has a clear vision which focuses on raising students' academic achievement and developing them as confident and responsible citizens. The leadership team has worked successfully to prepare and train teachers to meet the needs of a different student population with challenging behavioural needs. Overall, systems introduced have improved behaviour, teaching, and achievement, but a few teachers are not yet up to speed with these changes. The leadership recognises that it needs to iron out these inconsistencies. The leadership team monitors the school's performance effectively and has a good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The improvement plan focuses sharply on raising achievement and further developing the curriculum to meet the needs of cognitively able students who have complex emotional and

behavioural difficulties. Subject leadership is satisfactory and much better than at the time of the last inspection. The school makes a valuable contribution to the community through sharing its facilities and expertise in the performing arts. Governance is satisfactory. It is developing well its role as 'critical friend' to the school's leadership team.

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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?	3
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?	3
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	3

Achievement and standards

How well do learners achieve?	3
The standards ¹ reached by learners	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	3
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	3

¹Grade 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.

Personal development and well-being

How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	3
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	3
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	2
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	2
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	3
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	3
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	3
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 learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	3
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	3

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	3
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	3
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	3
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	3
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	3
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	3
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	3
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

Annex B

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

30 September 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of The Orchard School, Canterbury CT1 3QQ

Thank you for the way in which you welcomed us as visitors to your school. We enjoyed talking with you and found you to be courteous. It was good to hear that you think that your school is much better than it was at the time of the last inspection because, as you say, 'Our school is much stricter and so we are able to learn better'.

Your achievement in English and mathematics is satisfactory. Your lessons are better than they were at the time of the last inspection, and teaching is satisfactory. Your behaviour has also improved since that time.

Overall, your school is satisfactory now. I have asked your headteacher to help all of your teachers to make better use of what they know about what you can do and what you struggle with in lessons to plan to improve your learning and achievement. I have asked her to encourage all teachers to help and support you in the management of your behaviour in a consistent way. Finally, I have asked her to widen the range of courses you can follow at college to improve your chances of being better equipped to get a good job in the future. I strongly believe that, with your help, your school can improve further.

Best wishes on behalf of the inspection team,

Jeffrey Plumb Lead inspector