

Oakwood School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	107184
Local Authority	Sheffield
Inspection number	324545
Inspection date	28 April 2009
Reporting inspector	Rosemary Eaton

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)	29
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mr D Caborn
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy Dudley
Date of previous school inspection	13 March 2006
School address	Northern General Hospital Herries Road Sheffield South Yorkshire S5 7AU
Telephone number	0114 2261691
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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one additional inspector.

Description of the school

This very small school provides education for patients at Oakwood Young People's Centre which is a therapeutic unit for teenagers with acute mental health problems. The unit is provided and managed by Sheffield Children's Hospital and is part of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). The medical profession manages admission and discharge. Most patients are voluntary but some are sectioned under the Mental Health Act. The school, situated on a large hospital site, caters for students with a range of severe mental health problems including eating disorders, depression, conduct disorders and psychosis. Most students are dual registered and after an average stay of about five months usually return to their mainstream school or another educational setting. Most students are White British. Students over the age of 16 are no longer referred to the unit. On very rare occasions, a student may remain for three or four weeks after the end of Year 11 in order for treatment to be completed. There have been no such students for over three years. The school offers sessions for mainstream students with anxiety and attendance issues. Currently, 16 students from 11 schools attend this Acorn Group for up to one day each week. The school has gained the Charter Mark, Healthy Schools Award, and a number of awards for information and communication technology (ICT) provision including the Becta ICT mark. The week before the inspection, the CAMHS provision for primary-aged pupils was assimilated into Oakwood and is to be run as a Service. In the near future, the hospital plans to move the primary and secondary provision to a new site and extend the services offered.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 1

This is an outstanding school. It makes a very significant difference to the lives and prospects of some of society's most vulnerable young people. Students, their parents and the unit's medical staff are full of praise for the school. 'A super environment', 'an absolute gem', and 'the best help ever' are typical observations.

Despite the lengthy periods out of education experienced by many students, standards at Oakwood are broadly average. This is because students settle in quickly and make rapid progress. Their achievement is outstanding. Students in Year 11 are often successful in GCSE examinations, completing their course work despite their health problems and associated treatment. Students throughout the school make very great strides in their capacity to be effective learners, because teaching is outstanding. For example, excellent working relationships with staff encourage students to seek help when they are stuck. One remarked that 'you can ask if you don't understand and the teacher will explain and help until you do'. Students comment that they feel relaxed in school but 'still get on with the work'. This is because teaching, together with the exceptional curriculum, motivates students to do their best. Their very great enjoyment of school is a key element in students' outstanding personal development.

When first admitted to the unit, students often remark that they 'don't do school' and many have previously refused to attend their mainstream schools. Oakwood's nurturing ethos, high expectations and clear boundaries combine to transform students' attitudes to school so attendance is above average and allows students to learn and develop so rapidly. Students attending the Acorn Group also improve their attendance as they overcome their anxieties about school. Oakwood's students report that they feel entirely safe in school and that they are never bullied. On the contrary, they frequently support each other to a remarkable degree, making an exceptional contribution to the school community. Their concern for others reflects the outstanding care students receive. The school works exceptionally closely with the medical team so that teachers can take full account of changes to students' health. Support for students continues after they have left the school, enabling them to successfully reintegrate into mainstream schools or move on to college or training. Work related learning and the acquisition of crucial skills such as using ICT contribute to preparing students exceptionally well for their lives beyond school.

The Acorn Group was instigated by the school and has proved an excellent initiative, just one example of the way in which first-rate leadership has built on the strengths recognised by the previous inspection. It also demonstrates the school's exceptional commitment to offering equal opportunities to all students with mental health problems. Systems to measure students' progress have developed well and teachers collect a wealth of information about the learning and development of each one. This is used to the full to adapt lessons and the curriculum to meet individual needs. However, the way in which it is presented makes it time-consuming for leaders to analyse the information in order, for example, to compare progress in different subjects. Leaders' track record demonstrates clearly the school's outstanding capacity to continue to improve.

What the school should do to improve further

- Ensure that assessment information is organised in such a way that leaders can use it more efficiently when evaluating the school's performance and planning for improvement.

Achievement and standards

Grade: 1

The school uses a range of systems to record what students have learned during their short time at Oakwood and these demonstrate that they achieve outstandingly well. Most meet their challenging individual targets often making remarkable progress in subjects such as ICT and the creative arts. Relapses in students' mental health interrupt their progress from time to time. Nearly all students in Years 10 and 11 gain external accreditation for units of work in ICT, mathematics and work related learning and achieve the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network youth award at bronze or silver level. Higher attaining students successfully follow the GCSE courses they started in mainstream school. Students who find aspects of learning, such as reading, particularly hard, make outstanding progress because the school identifies their difficulties precisely and carefully targets support in these areas. Girls and boys' achievement is equally outstanding. Their exceptional academic success boosts students' self-esteem and supports their re-entry to mainstream education or training.

Personal development and well-being

Grade: 1

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Those who have previously found it hard to control their behaviour respond to the school's calm and purposeful learning environment. Lessons and learning are seldom disrupted. Meetings of all members of the unit and school are called in emergencies to support students who are encountering extreme difficulties. Students take this responsibility very seriously, drawing on their own experiences to offer advice or simply to recognise the struggle their friend is undergoing. These meetings are a powerful reminder to students that they are each expected to play their part in this extremely supportive community. They learn to appreciate that their physical well-being contributes to their mental and emotional health. Consequently, they take part in varied sporting activities and make informed decisions about issues such as smoking and relationships. Students take increasing responsibility for their own safety by using public transport to travel independently and understanding the potential dangers posed by the Internet. Their extremely positive attitudes to work and improved self-esteem help to enable students to move on successfully to the next phase in their education.

Quality of provision

Teaching and learning

Grade: 1

Teachers understand each student's personal and academic needs extremely well. This enables them to set work at the appropriate level and to expertly manage the behaviour of each individual. Above all, teachers are skilled at balancing their high expectations of students performance with the need to safeguard their fragile mental and emotional health. Teachers make sure students know what is expected of them and provide regular praise, encouragement and advice about how they can improve their work. Activities are chosen very carefully, for example, offering opportunities for students to be independent learners and to work as part of a group. Teachers make full use of the available resources and lessons frequently involve the imaginative use of ICT. Teaching assistants play a significant role in lessons, for instance,

by supporting individuals who are experiencing a particularly difficult time, enabling them to remain in lessons and continue to learn.

Curriculum and other activities

Grade: 1

The curriculum is highly successful in meeting the very diverse range of students' needs. For example, individuals may have embarked on a variety of examination courses or be unable to cope with full-time education. The school offers an excellent balance of academic subjects, sport, and creative and practical elements. A very effective programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education ensures that, for example, students in Years 7 to 9 learn about financial planning. Extremely strong partnerships support the provision of work experience and college links for some students. Days and weeks devoted to topics such as 'An Introduction to Shakespeare' bring the whole school together and enhance learning and personal development. A remarkable range of enrichment activities includes a host of day and residential visits, visitors to school and after-school clubs, such as, t cooking or sport. Sometimes, students initially find these less structured activities very challenging, but the school prepares them extremely well, for example, using ICT for research before taking part in a city-wide careers convention.

Care, guidance and support

Grade: 1

All aspects of students' care, guidance and support are given the utmost priority. The school meets current government safeguarding requirements. The staff are fully integrated with the unit team, attending handover meetings so that they are thoroughly appraised of students' exact state of health. Teachers work alongside unit staff to form the 'mini teams' that plan each student's care, support and reviews. These teams collect a wide range of information, including that from mainstream schools, to ensure students settle in as quickly as possible. Child protection procedures and staff training are rigorous and run in tandem with those of the unit, ensuring that relevant information is shared. Daily meetings of the whole community or smaller groups provide frequent opportunities for students to discuss individual problems or wider issues. Students confirm that they are able to talk to any of the staff about their concerns. Transition from the school is planned carefully and involves staff accompanying the student on preparatory visits and a staggered and supported transfer. Parents are involved throughout students' time at the school. A weekly support group run by teachers and nurses enables parents to consider issues such as violence or withdrawal in teenagers. A Connexions adviser visits weekly to help students prepare for the future. The Acorn Group offers support for students and their teachers, encouraging students to be more positive and intervening, for example, to prevent them refusing to attend school.

Leadership and management

Grade: 1

The outstanding leadership of the headteacher is fully supported by the senior team, who share her enthusiasm, commitment and extremely high expectations. The headteacher has led the assimilation of the primary provision with great sensitivity and continues to spend one day each week monitoring the service and supporting its manager. Self-evaluation is comprehensive and rigorous and provides a highly accurate view of the school's strengths and areas with scope for further development. For example, work is successfully taking place to ensure that

whole-school targets for students' academic progress are used as exceptionally well as those for improvements in their behaviour. Assessment information is used extensively to match provision to individual students' needs and to check that groups, such as boys or girls, are not disadvantaged. However, not all the information is drawn together to enable leaders to analyse it efficiently when identifying whole-school priorities. The school promotes community cohesion well. For example, it has developed training for mainstream staff on 'talking to troubled teenagers'. The Acorn Group helps to make sure that the school's resources are used to the full, enabling it to offer outstanding value for money. Governance is good, even though a number of governors are very new to their role. Governors are very supportive and increasingly find out at first hand about the school's performance.

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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	3
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	1
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	1

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?	1
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	1
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which 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	1

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?	1
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

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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	1
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	2
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	2
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**

Thank you for the help you gave me when I inspected your school. I very much appreciated the opportunity to talk to you and see your work. I judge Oakwood to be an outstanding school. It plays a significant part in helping to prepare you for your return to mainstream school or to move on to college or training.

Your personal development is outstanding. For example, you make an excellent contribution to the school community by supporting each other. Your behaviour is excellent and helps the school to be a safe and happy place in which to learn. The staff do their utmost to care for and support you, working closely with the unit staff.

You make excellent progress in your academic work. I think it is truly remarkable that those of you in Years 10 and 11 gain accreditation for your work, in ICT and in mathematics for instance, in the short time you attend the school. Importantly, you quickly make up for any lost time so that many of you go on to be successful in GCSE examinations.

The school provides an exceptional curriculum, which supports your learning and your personal development in equal measure. Your headteacher and the staff are constantly finding ways to improve the school. I have asked them to organise their assessments of your progress so that it is easier to use the information, for example, when deciding where improvements are needed.

I want to send each of you my very best wishes for the future.