

Great Oaks Small School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Great Oaks Small School is a small independent secondary school, situated in a semi-rural site, in converted farm buildings, on the outskirts of Minster in Kent. Established in 2001, the school moved to its present location in August 2006. It caters for students of average and above-average ability who may have specific learning difficulties, have experienced emotional or physical trauma or chronic illness and who have previously missed significant periods of education. All have attended mainstream primary schools, but have found the transition to secondary education difficult. There are currently 18 boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 18 years attending the school. Over half the students have a statement of special educational needs. Four students are looked after by their local authority.

The school aims to provide an 'holistic education which ensures a well rounded intellectual, moral, social, aesthetic and physical development for each student' and which builds each individual's confidence in a 'democratic atmosphere of tolerance and respect'. Students are prepared for external examinations appropriate to their needs and aspirations. The school was last inspected in 2007 when it met all the regulatory requirements.

Evaluation of the school

Great Oaks Small School provides a good quality of education for its students and is successful in meeting its aims. It has maintained its high quality provision since the last inspection and meets most of the regulations for independent schools. The school is successful in reintegrating students into education who may have experienced difficulties in their previous schools. Through using a curriculum carefully matched to their needs, supported by good teaching, students make good progress, especially in their personal development. The procedures for safeguarding the students are mostly good and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The welfare, health and safety of the students are satisfactory. Parents, carers and students are positive in their support of the school's care and its educational provision.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Quality of education

The quality of education provided by Great Oaks Small School is good because it is relevant to the needs of its students. The curriculum is good, appropriate for the ages of the students attending and is matched effectively to their learning and personal needs, as well as their abilities and aptitudes. Since the last inspection the schemes of work have improved and now more accurately reflect the range of teaching methodologies used in practice and the resources used. The school adopts an 'holistic' approach to the planning and teaching of the curriculum and the students' good personal and academic progress is regarded as indivisible. All students of compulsory school age attend on a full-time basis and have access to the National Curriculum. Students have the opportunity to take a range of subjects at GCSE, AS and A level. Some students have individual timetables to meet their individual needs and their progress through the school is dependent on those needs and their stage of development. All the students have a detailed individual education plan (IEP) devised by the member of staff responsible for supporting their needs and the students themselves. These fulfill the requirements of the various statements of special educational needs. Central to the school's strategies for supporting the students' development is the use of generic and individual neuro-developmental therapy. Exercises using this therapy are included daily as part of the curriculum provision for each student. Programmes of personal, social and health education, citizenship and careers education are taken by all students of compulsory school age, with the support of the local Connexions service. The careers course makes an effective contribution to developing skills that will contribute to students' future economic well-being. Resources for art and design and technology have been improved following recommendations at the last inspection and are now good.

The curriculum is enhanced by an extensive range of visits and visitors to the school. This is partly based on the school's environmental studies approach with many visits to local sites of environmental interest including the coast. Some clubs take place at lunchtime; currently art, games, film-making and trampolining. Students have the opportunity to attend a residential camp.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. It has a significant impact on the consistently good progress made by the students, supported by the positive relationships between students and their teachers, which is a notable feature of the school. This leads to most students having good attitudes to their learning, in contrast to some of their previous experiences. They comment that they particularly enjoy a lesson called 'stuff' which encompasses a very wide range of activities from cycle maintenance to rag rug making. In the most effective lessons tasks are purposeful and the whole of the time in the lesson is used productively with a good balance of teacher-talk and student activity. Where tasks are engaging, students willingly persevere to complete them. Teachers' questioning is a common strength in all lessons but in the best lessons it was an important element because the questions required thoughtful answers and teachers built on these to further develop the learning. There are missed opportunities in some lessons to use a wider range of purposeful tasks that could provide more challenge to the students of different

abilities and allow more opportunities to respond with greater levels of independence.

All the teachers know their students very well and have good access to details relating to each individual student's particular needs. The school takes care to brief staff well and this is supported by its small size and the regularity of staff meetings. As a result, despite a number of teachers being part time, students' educational experience demonstrates good continuity. Teachers are supported very well by the learning support assistants. The students are making good and in some cases better progress according to their starting points. The school takes care to carefully identify students' particular learning and personal needs on entry and maintains records of their progress appropriately. The carefully prepared individual education plans are reviewed regularly. Assessment in lessons is good, based on teachers' knowledge of students and through the targets set and recorded in the individual education plans. A newly-introduced system of standardised testing has been introduced at the beginning of the last academic year and is proving beneficial in helping to identify the gaps which the students have in their learning, as a result of missing school. This is proving successful in aiding the monitoring and review of students' progress and development, which the school was asked to improve at the last inspection. Students confirm that they like being involved in their own assessments. Parents regularly receive reports and meet with staff. Students are given good advice about the next stage of their education.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The development of students' confidence and self-esteem is central to the aims of the school and supported effectively by the positive learning environment. The school is a sociable community and each individual is highly valued. Students get on well with each other. They know the difference between right and wrong and know 'how far they can go' before staff need to remind them about their behaviour. The school believes that its students, 'are not angels but they work hard'. Staff are very positive role models and set high standards for the students. Students respond well, their behaviour is good and attendance is above average. Many expressed the view that the staff are very supportive and always there to help them. The school is run as a democratic institution and, in keeping with this approach, students' views are genuinely respected and they are expected to play a significant role in decision making on important issues relating to their community. The school council is a forum for anyone who works and studies at the school. It meets regularly, usually twice a week, and makes decisions about most aspects of school life. Students who are new to the school and have experienced difficulties in their previous education settle quickly into the relaxed and supportive atmosphere. Their spiritual development is supported effectively by the curriculum, which includes religious education. Students appreciate the trouble staff take to introduce them to new experiences, such as an archeological dig. The school is particularly effective at developing students' social skills. These are strongly supported by a range of

formally-organised activities and informal occasions such as the daily community lunchtime shared by all. As a result, students show clear gains in confidence, and significantly improved inter-personal and communication skills. Students are introduced to English public institutions and services through local visits. Their cultural development is supported effectively through humanities and citizenship lessons and visits outside school. Racial harmony and cultural tolerance are effectively promoted. The curriculum and planned activities have a positive impact on the students' economic well-being.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the students is satisfactory. Safeguarding procedures are robust; the designated member of staff has attended appropriate training and all staff are trained in accordance with the latest guidance. Students appreciate the care that they receive and report positive experiences, with comments such as, 'It is fine...I'm making progress...everyone is friendly and they listen to you.' Questionnaires completed by students, as well as parents prior to this inspection, confirm that they are happy to be at the school. The school has devised and implemented an appropriate range of policies to support this, including anti-bullying, health and safety on visits outside the school and safeguarding. The students are adamant that there is no bullying. The school carries out risk assessments on activities, both those in school and on visits outside school. They have carried out a very detailed risk assessment for the new design and technology area. Procedures for fire safety are good: a fire risk assessment has been carried out, all appliances are checked annually and fire drills are held regularly. However, the school has not carried out an up-to-date risk assessment which relates to the current building projects at the school and the uneven surface at the front of the school. Pupils are very well supervised at all times, both inside and outside the school. Pupils are encouraged to take appropriate exercise and the diet provided by school lunches is particularly healthy. The importance of a healthy diet is central to the school's aims for the personal development of students. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and has an appropriate three-year accessibility plan.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has good appointment procedures and checks the suitability of all staff to work with children. This information is accurately included on the single central register of staff appointments.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are suitable and make a positive contribution to the students' education, enabling effective learning. The school has a separate room for students who are unwell but it does not have a washbasin with hot and cold running water. The workshop for design and technology has been improved. It is

better resourced since the last inspection and now gives the students increased opportunities for using more processes and media. The state of the decoration inside the school is satisfactory, but some of the exterior is in a poor state of decoration. The drive at the front of the school has broken concrete panels and provides inadequate access, for example for an ambulance trolley. The school has not carried out an adequate risk assessment on this area. There are plans to continue to improve the facilities in the barn, and to provide additional classrooms and toilet accommodation.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides clear, accurate and fully up-to-date information for parents, carers and others through its prospectus and website which meets the regulations.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a set of procedures, which meets the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of the ones listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- ensure that the school has regard to the DCSF guidance Health and Safety: responsibilities and powers (DCSF 0803/2001)⁴ by preparing a risk assessment on the outside areas of the school including those under development (paragraph 3(4)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- ensure that the drive at the front of the school allows all students, including those with special needs, to enter and leave the school in safety (paragraph 5(h))
- install hot and cold running water in the medical room to meet the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l))

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

⁴ www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/4017/Responsibilites%20and%20Powers.doc

- ensure there is a satisfactory standard of decoration on the outside of the building (paragraph 5(q)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Continue to implement the newly-introduced assessment systems and use the data to track and address any significant omissions in students' learning.

Inspection judgement recording form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		√		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of students		√		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of students' needs		√		
How well students make progress in their learning		√		

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	√			
The behaviour of students		√		

Welfare, health and safety of students

The overall welfare, health and safety of students			√	
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School details

Name of school	Great Oaks Small School		
DCSF number	886/6093		
Unique reference number (URN)	133539		
Type of school	Secondary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	November 2001		
Age range of students	11–18		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 11	Girls: 5	Total: 16
Number on roll (part-time students)	Boys: 2	Girls: 0	Total: 2
Number of students with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 10	Girls: 3	Total: 13
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 2	Girls: 2	Total: 4
Annual fees (day students)	£ 7,683–£ 18,968		
Address of school	Ebbsfleet Farmhouse Ebbsfleet Lane Minster Kent CT12 5DL		
Telephone number	01843 822022		
Email address	mail@greatoakssmallschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Liz Baker		
Proprietor	The Trustees of Great Oaks Small School		
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton		
Dates of inspection	5–6 May 2010		