

Great Oaks Small School

Ebbsfleet Farmhouse, Ebbsfleet Lane, Ramsgate, Kent, CT12 5DJ

Inspection dates 19–21 March 2014

Overall effectiveness	Inadequate	4
Pupils' achievement	Adequate	3
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Adequate	3
Quality of teaching	Adequate	3
Quality of curriculum	Adequate	3
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management	Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings

This school is inadequate because

- Leadership and management are inadequate because of failures to ensure that students' welfare, health and safety are fully secured.
- Welfare, health and safety are inadequate because of shortcomings in the provision for safeguarding and students' safety.
- Leaders have not ensured that teaching and achievement are good and that all the regulations for independent schools are met.
- Teaching is adequate but too often there is insufficient challenge in the teaching and learning to enable all students to make good progress.
- Although in some subjects teachers' checks on students' progress inform their lesson planning, there is no whole-school system to track all students' progress and, consequently, some underachieve.
- A lack of clearly defined boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour limits the progress students make and reduces the school's effectiveness.
- Although adequate, there are weaknesses in the planning of work and activities, as some plans do not clearly identify how students' skills, knowledge and understanding will be developed as they move through the school.

The school has the following strengths

- The democratic approach to decision-making enables all staff and students to share their views and contribute to the way in which the school functions.
- Good relationships between staff and students build trust and respect, and support students to re-engage with their education.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school requires improvement and must take action to meet schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed 11 lessons. Students were heard reading and their work was examined. Eleven staff members were observed. One lesson was jointly observed with the newly appointed headteacher.
- The inspector had discussions with the trustees, the acting headteacher, the newly appointed headteacher who is not yet in post, staff, students, and parents and carers. Twelve staff questionnaires were received. Views expressed were taken into account. Parent View data could not be incorporated, because there were too few responses.
- A range of the school's documentation was examined. School policies were checked against the independent school regulations.

Inspection team

Angela Cook, Lead inspector

Additional inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Great Oaks Small School is an independent, secondary day school situated in a semi-rural location on the outskirts of the village of Minster-in-Thamet. The school is based in a large farmhouse with additional teaching areas in adjoining buildings. It first opened in 2001 and is registered to take students between the ages of 11 and 18 years.
- The school caters for students of average ability and above who have experienced disrupted education because of emotional or physical challenges or chronic illness, or because of their learning difficulties. The aim of the school is to provide:
 - ‘an holistic education which ensures a well-rounded intellectual, moral, social, aesthetic and physical development for each student’ so that all can develop their self-confidence within ‘a democratic atmosphere of tolerance and respect’.
- Students are prepared for external examinations in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- There are currently 20 boys and girls on roll. There is one student who is 10 years of age. Two students attend part-time, 16 are full-time and three are supported in their own homes. Eight students are looked after by their local authorities and 18 have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school uses local leisure and sports facilities to provide opportunities for physical education.
- The school was last inspected in March 2011.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and assessment by:
 - ensuring teaching challenges all learners in all lessons so that they are able to make good or better progress
 - developing assessment procedures so that students can be set meaningful targets and their progress can be checked in all subjects
 - implementing staff training so that all are clear about their roles in supporting students’ academic learning and their personal development.
- Strengthen the school’s provision for cultural development as a part of its spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.
- Ensure that the school’s systems effectively promote good behaviour.
- Develop planning of learning further so that:
 - students’ learning progresses in all subjects as they move up the school
 - the development of students’ skills, knowledge and understanding builds on their prior learning.
- **The school must meet the following independent school standards**
 - Ensure that school operates procedures for the safe recruitment and checking of staff to ensure that they are suitable individuals to have contact with young people (Paragraph 7).
 - Ensure that the school’s health and safety policy is implemented effectively by ensuring that the condition of the converted barn does not pose any health or safety risk to the students (Paragraph 11).
 - Ensure that the fire risk assessment is regularly reviewed and kept up-to-date (Paragraph 13).
 - Ensure that all required checks are carried out on staff at the time of the appointment (Paragraph 19(2)(a)).
 - Ensure that for all appointments since 1 September 2003 an enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check has been undertaken by the proprietor in respect of any member of staff

- appointed to a position at the school and the enhanced CRB certificate has been obtained before or as soon as was practicable after the person's appointment (Paragraph 19(2)(c)).
- Ensure that the single central register contains all the required information (Paragraph 22(3)).
 - Ensure that the accommodation and facilities are maintained to a sufficient standard to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the students (Paragraph 23C).
 - Ensure that all the following information is made available to parents of pupils, parents of prospective pupils and on request to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate:
 - the school's policies and arrangements for discipline and exclusions.
 - policies relating to the promotion of good behaviour and sanctions imposed as a result of poor behaviour.
 - the educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements of special educational needs and for pupils who speak English as an additional language.
 - details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.
 - academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations.
 - the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (Paragraph (24(1)(b))).
 - Ensure that where students are placed in the school by a local authority the local authority receives an annual account of the income received and the expenditure incurred by the school in respect of that student (Paragraph (24(1)(h))).
 - Ensure that the complaints procedure indicates that the panel's findings and recommendations will be provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about, and that it indicates that the findings and recommendations will be made available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the headteacher (Paragraph 25(i)).
 - Ensure that the complaints procedure states that written records of all complaints will be kept and there will be an indication of whether the complaints were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (Paragraph 25(j)).

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Adequate

Students' academic achievement is adequate as a result of the adequate overall quality of teaching. However, there is limited challenge for the most able in some subjects and limited planning in some subject areas. There has been a downward trend in students' achievement at GCSE over the last four years. In 2010, the small cohort of seven students taking GCSE examinations achieved grades A* to D in 78% of their examinations, but in 2013, this figure had fallen to 36% for the 13 students taking GCSEs. The results for the Entry Level examinations in science, mathematics, English, and art and design also show a decline achieved by the small cohorts. Results for Functional Skills in information and communication technology (ICT) have remained consistently high.

For many of the students, their biggest achievement is being able to re-engage with their education and being able to achieve success. Coming to school regularly has been a major challenge for some. A new initiative is ensuring that students are now better supported to develop their reading and writing skills. Individual sessions with high-quality teaching enable some to make very good progress. For example, a student who had had difficulty remembering his alphabet was able to recite it accurately after two weeks of targeted support. Teaching in mathematics ensures that students make adequate progress. One-to-one sessions in numeracy provide some additional support for the older students struggling with numeracy.

Almost all students leaving the school achieved well enough in their external examinations last year to gain places at local colleges to study for further qualifications, for example in equine studies, music performance, and motor sports maintenance and repair. In addition, one student joined an apprenticeship scheme, another gained a place on a university access course and one went into full-time employment but has decided to go to college in the next academic year. A former student has returned to teach business studies to sixth-formers. Students are motivated to learn because flexibility in the range of subjects and activities offered allows them to re-engage with learning and acquire the skills they need in adult life.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Adequate

Students' behaviour and their personal development are adequate. The many good relationships between staff and students build trust and respect. Most staff provide good role models for the students. Students and staff say that boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour are not clearly defined and, as a consequence, behaviour is not always good enough.

Students' attitudes to learning are positive where teaching is good, and most are keen to learn. The level of attendance is adequate when the additional needs of the students are taken into account. One parent/carer indicated that her son had made 'exceptional personal development' since attending the school.

Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is adequate. The curriculum provides good opportunities through its topic-based approach for students to learn about British society; for example a topic on law and order enabled students to explore the idea of democracy. In some lessons, teachers use questioning well to encourage students to think about what they have learned and to explore their understanding, such as why some skulls from Neolithic times have a hole cut in the cranium. Most students are clear about what is right and wrong, but the absence of well-defined boundaries for behaviour means that a sense of community is not always present. Students' awareness of different cultures is not well developed.

The school council effectively enables all staff and students to share their views and contribute in a

democratic way to the running of the school. When the council is called, most students are willing to attend. It provides a forum for airing differences and for helping students to develop their self-confidence to speak at meetings. Leaders ensure that when political issues are considered, steps are taken to offer a balanced presentation of opposing views.

Quality of teaching

Adequate

The quality of teaching is adequate and results in adequate achievement. Planning to meet the individual students' differing abilities is not always fully in place. The skills, knowledge and understanding of the most-able students are not extended sufficiently in all subjects, including in some one-to-one learning sessions. Not all staff have sufficiently good subject knowledge or high enough expectations to enable all students to make good progress. Consequently, some students underachieve. The school has put too little training in place to support staff to develop their skills. Often, learning support assistants are not well deployed to support students' learning. There is no whole-school framework for all teachers to use to assess students' progress or to set effective targets. Although some teachers do evaluate students' achievement, too often assessments focus on what has been taught rather than what has been learned.

Some staff effectively engage students in good learning by using a range of strategies that makes it interesting and relevant. Where teachers effectively tempt reluctant learners to re-engage with education, some good progress can be seen in the long term. For some students, developing their self-confidence so that they are able to enter the school building and gain access to their studies is a fragile and slow process. Good relationships between staff and students create a positive environment for learning. Students respond well to praise given by staff when reinforcing good behaviour and successful learning. Although students have a choice about attending some of their lessons, most are keen to attend.

A new approach to developing individual education plans for creating well-targeted support has recently been introduced. It is too early to identify any impact of this initiative, but it has refocused attention on students' statements of special educational needs, which has helped to identify a range of further support for students. Whole-school training is scheduled for next term to enable all staff to adopt the same approach to the teaching of phonics (the sounds that letter make).

Quality of curriculum

Adequate

The quality of the planning for subjects and activities (the curriculum) is adequate and leads to adequate progress. It ensures that students' basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy are suitably catered for. Staff planning is of variable quality. Some detailed plans are in place, for example in science, but in other subjects the planning, although adequate, is less thorough. It is not always fully clear how students' learning will progress as they mature and move through the school, nor how different topics build on the skills, knowledge and understanding gained earlier. There is little to show how students of differing abilities will be challenged effectively, and this currently results in some underachievement.

Cross-curricular topics are used in Key Stage 3 to link together work in different subjects. For example, during the inspection, the overarching topic was 'health'. This topic informed work in art, where vegetables were used in the junior class to print shapes; ICT, when health issues were explored on the internet; and history, when skulls in the Neolithic period were studied. Work for the older students is tailored to their interests and aspirations. One student is studying child development as she wants to be a nursery nurse, while another is studying law. The flexibility of the curriculum enables students, including the youngest, who have become disaffected with education to re-engage with their learning. Effective careers support, which starts in Key Stage 3, enables students to make well-informed choices about the next stage in their education. Most go on to further education in a range of local colleges. Personal, social and health education promotes students' personal development by building understanding, self-confidence and self-esteem.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety**Inadequate**

Provision for students' welfare, health and safety is inadequate. A number of the required independent school standards have not been met. The school's arrangements for safeguarding are not fully in place and do not meet requirements. Not all required checks have been completed on staff prior to their taking up their posts. The school is taking immediate steps to address this issue. There are minor omissions on the single central register, which the school is also attending to. Fire-fighting equipment is regularly maintained, but fire risk reviews are not carried out with sufficient regularity. As a result, the converted barn poses some health and safety risks.

There is now a clear understanding of the need to implement a rigorous recruitment process at all times. Extensive up-to-date training has ensured that staff know how to identify and manage child protection matters. They know the students well and are vigilant in managing their welfare. Recent first-aid training for staff has resulted in an abundance of well-qualified first aiders. A designated room for students who are unwell is close to the toilets and can be supervised. Staff and students enjoy together the cooked lunches provided by the school.

Good supervision by the staff keeps students safe on a day-to-day basis. The anti-bullying policy is effectively implemented. Students say there is little bullying and that any concerns can be brought up at the school council. A recently reviewed policy to promote good behaviour identifies sanctions that will be applied where there is poor behaviour.

Students use local facilities for their physical education, including a local gym and swimming pool. A sponsored walk along the coast provided everyone with the opportunity to make some form of contribution to Sport Relief. A detailed risk assessment ensured that all were safe. Staff and students enjoyed the trip and returned to school with entertaining stories to share.

Leadership and management**Inadequate**

Leadership and management of the school are inadequate, because there are a number of failed regulations related to students' welfare, health and safety. Not all required safeguarding checks have been made before staff took up their posts and not all checks are fully recorded as required. Several safety issues relating to the premises and accommodation were raised with the senior staff and trustees at the school. These included removing builders' rubbish, completing parts of the building work in the converted barn and moving a dangling cable to ensure students are safe. The school immediately planned how they would attend to these issues. Some inadequate security arrangements were discussed with the school, which has begun to deal with them.

Until recently, little progress was made in bringing about improvements. There is still some out-of-date and misleading information on the website, for example about the academic achievements at GCSE. A newly appointed headteacher, who is due to take up her post two weeks after the end of the inspection, was on-site during the inspection. She is a co-founder of the school and is currently completing her teaching qualifications. An evaluation of the quality of teaching was shared and agreed in a joint observation. Her vision and awareness of the areas for development reflect those of the trustees. As an interim arrangement, the Chair of the Trustees became acting headteacher and has introduced new strategies to improve learning and has updated staff training to comply with the requirements. The new initiative to support literacy has quickly led to an improvement in reading. The current support provided by the trustees is a strength. They have a shared vision for the school and clear views of what must be done to improve it.

The school does not provide all the information to parents, carers and others that is required by the regulations. Nor does it annually notify local authorities of the income and expenditure incurred for individual students. The complaints procedure has shortcomings and needs to be changed in order to comply with the requirements. The school fails to meet a number of the regulatory requirements for independent schools.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	133539
Inspection number	422618
DfE registration number	886/6093

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Secondary day
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	20
Number of part time pupils	5
Proprietor	The Trustees of Great Oaks Small School
Chair	Penny Jackson
Acting headteacher	Penny Jackson
Date of previous school inspection	24 March 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8,660–£21,386
Telephone number	01843 822022
Email address	mail@greatoakssmallschool.co.uk

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