

Great Oaks Small School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	886/6093
Unique Reference Number	133539
Inspection number	317885
Inspection dates	20-21 September 2007
Reporting inspector	Michael Thirkell AI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order 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 school, situated in a semi-rural site, in attractive 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 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 14 boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 18 years attending the school. Half the students have statements of special educational need. 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.

Evaluation of the school

Great Oaks Small School is a good school with a number of outstanding features. It is successful in meeting its aims. The school uses effectively a range of carefully considered strategies which support the students' good academic and personal progress. The successful outcomes achieved by most students, particularly in their personal development, reflect the vision of the school leadership and the hard work and commitment of staff. The care and consideration given to students is outstanding. The curriculum is matched well to the needs of individual students. Teaching is good overall and has a number of outstanding features. Parents, carers and students of all ages are overwhelmingly positive in their support of the school's care and its educational provision. The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

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 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. The good provision ensures that students are suitably challenged. The positive development of students, particularly those who have been at the school for a period of time, is notable. The curriculum is

supported by outline schemes and other documents. Whilst the schemes of work meet the requirements appropriately, they are variable in the detail that they provide and do not all contain reference to the teaching methodologies seen to be used effectively in practice, nor to the resources to be used to achieve the students' learning goals. The school emphasises its *'holistic'* approach to the planning and teaching of the curriculum. The students' good personal and academic progress are regarded as indivisible. All students of compulsory school age attend on a full-time basis and have access to all aspects of the National Curriculum.

Central to the school's strategies for supporting the students' development is the use of generic and individual neuro-development therapy. Exercises using this therapy are included as part of the curriculum provision for each student on a daily basis. Where necessary, students' timetables may be modified to meet their individual needs and their progress through the school is dependent on those needs and their stage of development. Suitable 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.

The quality of teaching is good overall and it has a number of outstanding features. It has a significant impact on the outstanding progress made by a number of students, supported by the positive relationships between students and their teachers which are a notable feature of the school. Both full- and part-time teachers know their students very well; they 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 well by the number of learning support assistants available.

The school takes care to carefully identify students' particular learning and personal needs when they enter the school and maintains records of their progress appropriately. All students have carefully prepared individual education plans (IEPs), which are reviewed regularly. The IEPs are helpful documents. Assessment in practice is good, based on teachers' knowledge of students and through the targets set and recorded in the IEPs. Nevertheless, the school is aware of the need to develop more detailed formal written records to aid the monitoring and review of students' progress and development. Realistic and relevant strategies have already been devised to improve recording whilst ensuring that teaching staff, the majority of whom are part-time, are not unnecessarily overburdened with administration.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students

The quality of students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall and is outstanding with respect to their social and moral development. 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 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. Behaviour is outstanding supported by the generally very positive relationships between staff and students. The school council is a forum of anyone who works and studies at Great Oaks Small School. It meets regularly, usually once a week, and makes decisions about most aspects of school life. Younger students, who are new to the school and have experienced difficulties in their previous education, settle quickly into the relaxed and supportive atmosphere. The school provides a very positive learning environment in which students' knowledge of themselves, their self-esteem and self-confidence are effectively and progressively developed.

Students' spiritual development is supported effectively by their aesthetic and physical development. Art and design education is a core component of the school's programme of development for students, as are the regular exercises provided through neuro-development therapy. 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 staff and students. As a result students, a number of whom have experienced considerable trauma prior to attending the school, show clear gains in confidence, allied with evidence of significantly improved inter-personal and communication skills. Parents expressed overwhelming support for the school and their appreciation of the improvement they have seen in their children's social, as well as academic development, in questionnaires returned during the inspection. Students' cultural development is supported effectively by school visits and by aspects of the curriculum such as humanities and citizenship.

Welfare, health and safety of the students

The quality of welfare, health and safety provided for students is outstanding and they appreciate the thoughtful care that they experience. Questionnaires completed by students, as well as parents prior to this inspection, confirm that they are happy to be at the school and that they feel safe. The central aims of the school require that the care, health and safety of the students and quality of their learning environment should be key elements in their development. The school is very aware of its responsibilities and has prepared an appropriate range of policies and documents that support the care and safety of students. 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. Records show that their attendance is good. All regulatory requirements are met. Despite some features of the accommodation still being incomplete, the school fulfil its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and has an appropriate three-year accessibility plan relating to future school development.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school is well staffed to meet the needs of the students. The management of the school is fully aware of its responsibilities to ensure that all staff are appropriately and carefully checked before taking up their appointments. There are clearly established procedures for undertaking such checks. Records of all checks undertaken are maintained clearly and in the prescribed manner.

School's premises and accommodation

The school premises and accommodation are satisfactory overall with many very positive features. In a number of respects the converted farm buildings, which currently provide the main accommodation, are ideal to support the aims of the school. Some aspects of the accommodation in the converted farm buildings are still in the process of being completed. The rate of completion is subject to financial constraints. Whilst providing suitable classroom accommodation, they importantly provide the warm, relaxing and protective learning environment which is so important to the needs of students. Younger students who are new to the school comment positively about the positive feeling of a number of aspects of the premises and buildings.

The school now provides specialist classrooms for art and design, information and communication technology and design and technology (DT). This represents a significant development of the provision since the last inspection. The library provides a good resource in relation to the size of the school. Since the last inspection, the accommodation for art and design has been significantly improved and now provides a good working environment for the subject. Despite the high quality of creative work seen in art and design opportunities to work in a wider range of material are limited by the current range of resources available. The workshop for DT, whilst satisfactory, needs further development to complete it fully. The limited range of equipment in the workshop restricts the range of opportunities and experiences available to students for designing and making.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides all the required information for parents, carers and others through its prospectus and website.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a complaints policy which meets the requirements whilst ensuring that proceedings are in keeping with the ethos and aims of the school.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

What the school could do to improve further

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

- continue to improve the recording of details of assessment and target setting
- consider how schemes of work could be extended to reflect the range of teaching methodologies used in practice and the resources used
- continue to improve the resources for art and DT in order to extend the opportunities for students to use a range of media and processes
- improve training opportunities for staff as indicated in the carefully considered development plan, in particular for special needs.

School details

Name of school	Great Oaks Small School		
DCSF number	886/6093		
Unique reference number	133539		
Type of school	Secondary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	5 November 2001		
Age range of students	11-18		
Gender of students	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time students)	Boys: 7	Girls: 4	Total: 11
Number on roll (part-time students)	Boys: 3	Girls: 0	Total: 3
Number of students with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 5	Girls: 2	Total: 7
Number of students who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 1	Total: 1
Annual fees (day students)	£7,500-£18,515		
Address of school	Ebbsfleet Farmhouse Ebbsfleet Lane Minster Ramsgate Kent CT12 5DL		
Telephone number	01843 822022		
Email address	greatoaks@freeuk.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Liz Baker		
Proprietors	Paula Lewis, John Baker, Liz Baker		
Reporting inspector	Michael Thirkell AI		
Dates of inspection	20-21 September 2007		