

Oxclose Community School

Inspection report

Unique Reference Number	108864
Local Authority	Sunderland
Inspection number	309822
Inspection date	2 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Deborah Wright

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Community
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	
School	934
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Mrs Linda Williams
Headteacher	Mr M. Foster
Date of previous school inspection	1 May 2005
School address	Dilston Close Oxclose Village Washington Tyne and Wear NE38 0LN
Telephone number	0191 4195120
Fax number	0191 4195120

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Introduction

The inspection was carried out by two Additional Inspectors. Inspectors evaluated the overall effectiveness of the school and investigated the following issues: achievement and standards, teaching and learning and leadership and management. Evidence was gathered from: the school's self-evaluation form, assessment data, observation of lessons, discussions with staff and students and a member of the governing body, and from parental questionnaires. Other aspects of the school's work were not investigated in detail, but inspectors found no evidence to suggest that the school's own assessments were not justified, and these have been included where appropriate in the report.

Description of the school

Oxclose Community School is an average sized comprehensive school. Student numbers have increased over the last few years. The number of students entitled to free school meals is just above average. The number of students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is well above average. Nearly all students come from White British backgrounds. An extensive building programme has just been completed at the school. In September 2004, the school was designated a specialist visual and performing arts college. The substantive headteacher is currently on secondment to the local authority and an acting headteacher has been in place since September 2007. Both were present during the inspection.

Key for inspection grades

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

Overall effectiveness of the school

Grade: 3

Oxclose Community School is an inclusive community which provides its students with a satisfactory and improving education. The school has some good features, notably the care and support for students and their personal development and well-being. The new building is welcomed by staff and students for its space, light and excellent resources. The setting is conducive to learning and within it the headteacher, staff and governors provide an inclusive and positive educational environment in which students can develop the skills and attitudes necessary to work together effectively. Students respond positively: they are confident and demonstrate respect for themselves and each other. In particular, they show courtesy and sensitivity to the students with physical disabilities, who are fully integrated and add considerably to the life of the school.

Inspectors agree with the school that the standards and achievement of students is satisfactory overall. Students joining the school at age 11 have reached standards similar to those found nationally. However, for the last three years, standards in national tests for mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3 have been below average. In English, standards were above average in 2006, but fell back to below average in 2007. Current standards at Key Stage 3 are improving. The standards reached by students at Key Stage 4 show improvement. In 2007, in GCSE and vocational qualifications, 66% of students gained the equivalent of at least five good A* to C GCSEs, which is above average. The proportion gaining five or more good GCSEs including English and mathematics is closer to the national average but reflects a marked improvement from 24% in 2006. This is largely due to the improvement in results in mathematics. Many students at Key Stage 4 achieve well, attaining the highest grade in vocational courses and in GCSE physical education (PE) and information and communication technology (ICT). The school's own tracking of students' progress confirms an improving picture, with the proportion of students likely to achieve grade C or above in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science similar to that found nationally. Improvement at Key Stage 3, and in some GCSE subjects at the highest grades, is slower. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities generally achieve as well as others.

Students' personal development and well-being are good. Their attendance is average but has improved over the last few years. The students respond well to the school's high expectations of their behaviour and particularly to the fact that they are trusted, for example, to stay in the school building over break and lunchtime. Students know that their opinions are heard and valued. They appreciate the way the school seeks their views such as in their recent involvement in designing aspects of their new building. Students say they feel safe in school and recognise that a number of staff can be relied on to help and support them. They feel confident that any concerns raised by them are dealt with swiftly. Students recognise the need for healthy lifestyles and many take part in extra-curricular sporting activities. They make significant contributions to the life of the school and the community in a range of ways, including charitable work.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory, particularly at Key stage 3, and this agrees with the school's own evaluation. An increasing proportion of teaching is good. However, there is a significant proportion of teaching, particularly in core subjects, which is not as good as it needs to be to raise achievement strongly. In the best lessons, teachers have planned well so that the work challenges students appropriately. Tasks are interesting, lessons are presented with enthusiasm and praise is used well to carry students forward with eagerness for learning. For example, in a science lesson when considering the possibility of flight on Mars, students

were engaged and showed commitment to their learning. In less effective lessons, work is not planned to address the range of needs of the students, explanations are sometimes not clear enough, or students are not engaged sufficiently in discussion to make the knowledge their own.

The school offers a good curriculum which benefits from its specialist status in the performing arts. The curriculum reflects well the school's commitment to its specialism. At Key Stage 3, there are good opportunities for students to experience aspects of performing arts. For example, students have the opportunity to sample lessons in visual arts in Year 9, helping them to make an informed choice in their options. There are opportunities for students in Year 7 to improve their literacy skills. In Key Stage 4, all students follow a well balanced programme, comprising GCSEs and some vocational courses. This reflects the school's aim of ensuring greater flexibility and choice, to meet the needs and aspirations of all students at Key Stage 4. There is a rich menu of extra-curricular activities in which the students participate enthusiastically. During the inspection, students displayed evident pleasure and skill in taking part in the school's musical and in a girls' band rehearsal.

Care, guidance and support are good and contribute significantly to students' enjoyment of school and to their well-being. Students are very positive about the help they receive in making informed choices, for example in choosing their subject options at the end of year 9. Older students value the help they received in planning the next steps in their education, training or employment. Students' progress is monitored well, particularly if the standard of their work is on the borderline of gaining a grade C at GCSE. This leads to focused intervention to boost achievement. However, whilst this tracking and intervention is helpful, achievement is sometimes limited by the quality of teaching.

The leadership and management of the school are good. There are signs of improvement in a number of aspects of the school's work. The headteacher, staff and governors have a common sense of purpose and a clear picture of the school's performance. They are securely focussed on raising standards and achievement and matters are improving. Leadership is successfully tackling the areas which need improvement most, for example middle leadership in English and mathematics, and the headteacher has managed changes to staffing which are beginning to have an impact on students' learning and achievement. In particular, senior staff are focussing their attention on increasing the accountability of middle leaders for the performance of their departments and improvements are now becoming evident. The senior team has made firm decisions and supported innovations which have led to improvements at Key Stage 4 and they are now starting to robustly tackle underachievement at Key Stage 3. They demonstrate good capacity to improve further. The school's specialist status had had a very positive impact on the school, not only in terms of the examination success of its related subjects, but also in enriching the curriculum and supporting the development of students' confidence and self-esteem. The headteacher and senior team have successfully maintained the day-to-day smooth running of the school whilst handling significant challenges related to the new accommodation. The school is an orderly, caring community founded on good relationships between staff and students. This is a tribute to the hard work of staff and good leadership. Governors are providing an appropriate level of challenge and support to the school. Given the current level of achievement, value for money is satisfactory overall.

What the school should do to improve further

- Raise achievement and standards, particularly in core subjects at Key Stage 3, and for the most able students.

- Increase the proportion of good and better teaching particularly in Key Stage 3.

A small proportion of the schools whose 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

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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?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

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 disabilities make progress	3

Personal development and well-being

How good is the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?	2
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
How well learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	3
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	3

The quality of provision

How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of the learners' needs?	3
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

¹ Grade 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.

Annex A

Leadership and management

How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?	2
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	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination tackled so that all learners achieve as well as they can	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	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

Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection

3 April 2008

Dear Students

Inspection of Oxclose Community School, Sunderland, NE38 0LN

On behalf of the inspection team, I would like to thank you for contributing to the recent short inspection of your school. Particular thanks go to those of you who met with us and all of you who shared your views with us. This helped us to reach our conclusions about the school.

Oxclose School provides you with a satisfactory and improving education. Some aspects of what it provides are good; in particular I would like to highlight the following areas:

- Personal development and well-being are good. You made it clear to us that you feel safe in the school. Some of you take on responsibilities, including representing others on the school council. Your behaviour around school and in lessons was good and we were very pleased to see the positive relationships you have and the respect you show each other and to staff.
- Teaching and learning is satisfactory overall and there is much which is good.
- The curriculum is good and increasingly meets your needs. Many of you spoke about the wide range of activities available outside of lessons.

The headteacher, staff and governors are working hard to ensure that you all achieve the best you can. We have asked them to make improvements in the following areas:

- Raise standards and achievement, particularly in core subjects at Key Stage 3 and for more able students.
- Improve satisfactory teaching to good or better.

You can play your part by making sure you work hard and do your best.

Please accept our best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely

Deborah Wright

Lead inspector