

Oakbank

Hyde End Lane, Spencers Wood, Reading RG7 1ER

Inspection dates

21–22 June 2016

Overall effectiveness

Good

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- This is a rapidly improving school. The principal, together with her senior team, has focused relentlessly on raising standards and bringing about sustained improvement.
- The governing body is very effective in supporting and challenging school leaders. Together with staff from the CfBT Schools Trust, they have established a culture of high expectations which is helping the school to improve further.
- Standards are rising quickly. Pupils make expected progress in all subject areas and across all year groups.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. They have embraced willingly the higher expectations of their behaviour and this is having a very positive effect on their learning and progress.
- There is a strong ethos of mutual support and respect. Pupils are proud of their school, their attendance is much better and they work hard in lessons.
- Teaching in most subjects is good and there are examples of excellent practice. Teachers know their pupils well and plan interesting lessons to build on their knowledge and understanding.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- As a result of weaker progress in the past, not enough pupils achieve more than expected progress by the end of key stage 4. This is particularly true of the most able pupils.
- Teaching is not yet highly effective across all departments to secure excellent outcomes for all pupils. Consequently, pupils are not always challenged sufficiently.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise achievement further by:
 - accelerating the rates of progress of all pupils, particularly the most able and the disadvantaged, so that they make more than expected progress from their starting points
 - ensuring that progress in all subjects, especially in science, matches that seen in English, mathematics and other successful subjects.
- Strengthen teaching and learning by:
 - ensuring that lessons stretch and challenge all pupils, particularly the most able
 - sharing the practice of the most successful departments so that all teachers apply the school's feedback model consistently and pupils know exactly what they need to do to improve their work.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The principal has been in post since September 2014. Her passion and vision for the school have been instrumental in bringing about significant changes. Together with her senior team, governors and support from the CfBT Schools Trust, she has systematically addressed the issues in the school which were preventing it from making stronger progress. As a result, the school is now on an upward trajectory.
- The school is a tight community. Relationships between leaders, staff and pupils are very positive and there is a warmth and generosity of spirit which shines through. This ethos, together with the impact of the many improvement strategies which have taken place, has ensured that pupils now make better progress, particularly in previously weak areas such as English.
- The school prides itself on its links with the local community. The school motto is 'Challenge, Commitment, Community', and in keeping with this, parental engagement is high. Parents give generously of their time to volunteer. For example, a group helped to paint the school building, another parent puts up displays and another volunteers as a school counsellor.
- Staff are proud to work at Oakbank. They talk enthusiastically of the improvements brought about, particularly as a result of the principal's leadership, and have embraced the changes asked of them. One teacher remarked that 'people all get behind new ideas and initiatives'.
- Middle leaders are now much more effective. The principal has developed their leadership skills through targeted training and giving them the opportunity to grow. One middle leader said: 'Middle leadership is given autonomy. We are the driving force in the school.' The success of this approach is evident in the improved standards of teaching and learning. However, there is still some variability in the effectiveness of departmental leadership. This means that some subjects are not yet achieving excellent outcomes for pupils.
- Leaders have rigorously tackled the previous poor standards in English. A five-year GCSE plan is now in place with a clear focus on developing pupils' skills from Year 7 onwards. Teachers track pupils' progress carefully and put extra support in place when pupils fall behind. Standards are therefore rising in this area, although there is more work to do to stretch and challenge the most able pupils.
- The principal has introduced an effective system to keep track of teachers' performance. They are assessed rigorously against a number of areas of their work and will only proceed up the pay scale if they can demonstrate that they have improved pupils' learning and achievement.
- The school has invested heavily in training for staff. For example, all staff undertook training about extended writing. This helped them to improve pupils' writing skills. Support is readily provided for staff in need of specific help. Newly qualified teachers and trainees speak warmly of the support they receive. This is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching and is leading to standards rising sharply.
- The school works very closely with the CfBT Schools Trust. Staff from the trust with expertise in English and science regularly visit the school to model teaching and provide advice and guidance to school staff. Senior staff from the trust also provide advice and guidance to school leaders. This collaborative, challenging, yet supportive approach is having an impact on raising standards.
- Parents are very positive about the school and recognise and appreciate the improvements made. In particular, they value the leadership of the principal and the supportive, caring learning environment. One parent said: 'My daughter is incredibly happy at the school. She is thriving socially and academically and has a very positive attitude to learning.'
- The school works closely with a number of partners. For example, eight teachers have been working with a teaching school in Wokingham on their outstanding teacher programme. Staff compare pupils' work to that in other local schools to make sure it is of a similar standard. Consequently, teachers' professional skills are further developed and this is improving their practice in the classroom.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced and provides a wide range of opportunities for a small school. A good range of subjects is offered at GCSE level with plans for new subjects to be introduced as the school expands. Examples are triple science and a second modern foreign language. Currently, a small proportion of pupils follow the EBacc (English baccalaureate), but plans are in place for this number to increase.
- Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) lessons are supplemented by work done in the daily tutor period. Pupils follow a rich programme designed to build their skills in numeracy, literacy and debating as well as expanding their knowledge of current affairs. The compulsory 'Widening Horizons' programme for all pupils at the end of the school day is a key feature. It allows pupils to follow extra-curricular activities as well as providing an opportunity for the most able key stage 4 students to study additional GCSE subjects. The skills and understanding that pupils gain from these experiences prepare

them well for life in modern Britain.

- School leaders have made wise decisions about how to spend their pupil premium allocation. For example, extra staff have been employed to give small groups of pupils extra tuition in English, mathematics and science, with the result that pupils' achievement has risen in these areas. The school regularly reviews how it spends the additional funds and the impact this is having.
 - Pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development (SMSC) is at the heart of Oakbank's philosophy. For example, themed days provide pupils with an insight into different races and religions. Students who practise a range of different faiths become 'in-faith ambassadors' for the school. The school has a strong moral purpose and pupils are expected to give back to their community. Pupils told inspectors that they feel they could take on even more leadership responsibility than they currently have. A teacher fulfils the role of mapping the development of SMSC across the school, and has identified where there are gaps to be filled.
 - There are numerous opportunities for pupils to partake in a range of activities in music, art and drama and there is a very wide programme of trips and visits available to broaden pupils' horizons. Plans are in place to enhance pupils' cultural awareness further by developing more international links.
- **The governance of the school**
- Since the last inspection, a review of the governing body has been carried out. As a result, the number of governors was reduced and governors have become more strategic in their role. They know the school well and are realistic about its strengths and areas for development. They have a clear vision for the school, are ambitious for its future and are a strong force for leading the school forward.
 - Governors have a range of professional skills which bring extra value to the school. They have become more confident to ask challenging questions of school leaders and these are clearly recorded in the governors' minutes of meetings. As a result, they are holding the school to account much more effectively than in the past.
 - Governors support the principal to make decisions in the best interests of the school. For example, they link with key areas of the school, visiting regularly and providing comments about what they see. They scrutinise the management of teachers' performance rigorously.
 - In keeping with the ethos of the school, governors link closely with parents and involve them as much as possible in the life of the school.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. School leaders and governors work closely with parents and other stakeholders to ensure there is a clear and constant focus on creating a culture of safety. Policies and procedures are compliant and reviewed regularly. However, it is more than just a paper exercise. The school's close-knit community ensures that everyone looks after each other and any issues that arise are dealt with quickly and promptly.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- The quality of teaching and learning has improved since the previous inspection and is now good overall. This is due to leaders at all levels implementing changes which are both challenging and supportive.
- School leaders and governors have taken swift action to eliminate poor teaching. Expectations of staff are now much higher. The monitoring calendar ensures that all aspects of teachers' work are regularly reviewed.
- Parents and pupils say that teaching has improved over the last two years. One parent noted: 'I am pleased with the teaching and there is regular feedback, which involves me as a parent in my daughter's work.'
- Teachers plan interesting lessons which pupils enjoy so there are only rare occasions when pupils are off-task.
- Where teaching leads to good or better achievement, there are high expectations with an insistence on high standards of work and presentation. Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves through skilful questioning and they set to work quickly and eagerly. They are given demanding work to do and they rise to the challenge. They enjoy working together and the strong relationships between peers and between teachers and pupils result in faster progress.
- Where teaching is less effective, there is a lack of challenge, particularly for the most able. When this occurs, pupils lose focus and drift off-task. This slackens the pace of learning, and progress is much slower both within the lesson and over time.
- A few pupils told inspectors that they thought the work was sometimes too easy and repetitive. They felt they could be stretched more.
- Homework is set regularly using the parent portal. When asked, pupils said that homework helped them

to prepare for the next lesson and was linked to their learning in class. However, a proportion of pupils do not complete the homework set, which slows their learning down.

- Teachers track pupils' progress rigorously and keep a close eye on disadvantaged pupils. They know their pupils extremely well and where they spot that a pupil is falling behind, they are quick to put a plan in place to close the gap. Often the support is only needed for a few weeks to help get a pupil back on track. This personalised approach ensures that the pace of progress does not flag.
- Leaders have implemented a whole-school approach to giving pupils feedback on their work. Pupils know and understand the system well and they told inspectors that they found it very helpful. They use it to assess their own work or their peers' and teachers use it to write personalised and detailed 'growth' targets. Inspectors saw exemplary practice of this in many subjects such as English, mathematics, humanities and modern foreign languages.
- There is a major focus on the development of literacy and this permeates throughout the school. The leadership of literacy is strong and teaching supports the development of pupils' reading, writing and oracy skills very well. The good training teachers have received has helped them to promote literacy in their lessons more effectively. The success of this can be seen in pupils' books where they have completed extended writing tasks across the curriculum. This is having a positive impact on their learning and progress, particularly in preparation for public examinations.
- Teaching and leadership in mathematics is a strength of the school and consequently pupils make very good progress. The daily tutor programme develops numeracy skills further and deepens work done in class. For example, during the inspection, pupils in Year 8 were doing a 'big maths' activity finding solutions to problems using a snakes and ladders game. Consequently, pupils are developing skills in preparation for the world of work later on.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- All staff work effectively to promote the development of pupils' personal qualities. This contributes very well to the good progress pupils make in developing their social awareness.
- Pupils at Oakbank wear their uniform with pride. This is because leaders are insistent on high standards of personal presentation and pupils respond well to this.
- Pupils told inspectors they were glad they chose to come to Oakbank. They like the small size and the community feel. One pupil said: 'We're all so close, like a family.' They reported how much better the school has become since the arrival of the new principal. They greatly appreciate the changes that have been made and how it is helping them to learn better and make more progress. These positive attitudes are a significant factor in the school's overall improvement.
- The learning environment is clean, calm and orderly and pupils enjoy coming to school. This is evident in their punctuality to lessons and improved attendance rates, which are now above the national average. There is a small gap between the attendance of disadvantaged pupils and others in the school. The school is addressing this by working with individual families and providing transport where necessary. The level of persistent absence is below the national average and improving year on year.
- Pupils report that they feel very safe at school and parents confirm this. One parent commented: 'The school ensures that my daughter feels valued and challenged in a safe, happy environment.'
- Work done in PSHE lessons, through the tutor programme and in assemblies is effective in helping pupils understand the importance of British values, how to keep themselves safe and how to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Pupils have a solid understanding of issues concerning discrimination and extremism.
- There are effective arrangements for the transition of pupils from primary school. Work starts with pupils throughout Year 5 so they have confidence when they transfer to secondary school and therefore make a good start. This is particularly effective for vulnerable pupils.
- Teachers encourage pupils to take on leadership opportunities and serve their community. In an assembly, Year 9 pupils were asked to consider becoming senior school leaders and 'leave a legacy – make a difference'. Similarly, pupils show their leadership skills in raising significant sums of money for their chosen charities.
- In lessons, pupils do all that is asked of them, but they do not yet consistently demonstrate a thirst for learning to help them develop into confident, self-assured learners.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- The 'Oakbank Way' sets out expectations of pupils' conduct and there is a clear behaviour policy which pupils understand fully and abide by.
- Behaviour has improved significantly since the last inspection. The 'removal' room which used to house pupils who were disrupting lessons is no longer in operation as there is no need for it to exist. The number of fixed-term exclusions has also reduced over time. While the number of permanent exclusions has been above the national average for the last two years, the school exhausts all avenues before this becomes necessary.
- Pupils report that bullying is rare. They have the confidence to report any incidents through the 'beat the bully' box and know that staff will respond appropriately.
- During break and lunchtimes, pupils mingle happily together. They are polite and mature in their dealings with each other, staff and visitors.
- Staff deal swiftly and effectively with the occasional low-level disruption that at times occurs during lessons.
- A very small number of pupils attend off-site provision. Oakbank staff liaise closely with teachers in these alternative centres to ensure pupils are on track with their learning and personal development. They make frequent visits to ensure pupils are safe and well looked after.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils in Years 7 and 9 entered the school with standards in English and mathematics that were broadly in line with those expected of their age. Pupils in Years 8 and 10 entered the school with below expected standards. A low proportion of pupils currently in Year 10 are of high ability. These pupils will be the first in the school to sit GCSE examinations in September 2017.
- Pupils in all years and across all subjects make at least expected progress from their starting points. However, not enough pupils make more than expected progress, especially the most able.
- As the school has not yet had any pupils sitting public examinations, teachers have sensibly collaborated with other schools to compare the work of Oakbank pupils with that of their peers elsewhere. Staff from the CfBT Schools Trust, as well as from other schools outside the Trust, regularly scrutinise pupils' work to measure progress against national standards. As a result, teachers are increasingly confident in the accuracy of their assessments.
- Disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs or disability are progressing well and at the same rate as other pupils in the school. In some cases, for example in English and science in Year 7, disadvantaged pupils make better progress than their peers.
- The most able pupils make good progress from their starting points. The school has a particularly clear focus on increasing the rates of progress for this group of pupils.
- In all year groups, a high percentage of pupils make expected progress in English and an even higher percentage make expected progress in mathematics. However, pupils are not progressing as well in science.
- The percentage of pupils making more than expected progress in English and mathematics is below the national average but improving. This is due to the legacy of poor teaching in the past and staffing difficulties, particularly in English. Leaders and governors are fully aware of this and have already begun to set more challenging targets for pupils.
- Oakbank is a 'reading' school and all staff and pupils read widely and regularly together to develop a love of reading. There is a daily 'Drop Everything And Read' session where the whole school reads the same book at the same time. At the time of the inspection, they were reading *Wonder*. This is having a very marked impact especially on boys' reading and is further developing pupils' literacy and communication skills.
- School staff guide and support pupils effectively to make choices about their future pathways. They encourage them to aim high from the outset. Pupils in Year 9 talked of their positive experiences when making their GCSE option choices, with one commenting, 'I had the best support anyone could hope for'. Pupils in the upper school appreciate the opportunities they have to make visits to universities in Reading and Oxford. As a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.

School details

Unique reference number	138367
Local authority	Wokingham
Inspection number	10012323

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	305
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Stieve Butler
Principal	Maggie Segrove
Telephone number	0118 988 3616
Website	www.oakbank.education
Email address	enquiries@oakbank-cfbt.org
Date of previous inspection	14–15 May 2014

Information about this school

- This is a smaller-than-average secondary free school. It opened in 2012 on the site of a previous local authority school. It currently has pupils in Years 7 to 10.
- The CfBT Schools Trust sponsors the school.
- Most pupils are White British.
- The number of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is slightly above the national average.
- The proportion of pupils that are disadvantaged and supported by the pupil premium (government funding to support pupils known to be eligible for free school meals) is above the national average.
- Three pupils are educated off the school site at alternative education providers Autoskills and Just Around the Corner.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 24 lessons across all year groups and in most subjects.
- Inspectors met senior and middle leaders, subject and pastoral leaders, two groups of pupils, the chair and two members of the governing body, and a representative of the CfBT Schools Trust.
- Inspectors reviewed 111 responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire (Parent View) and six emails sent directly by parents to the inspection team. Inspectors also took account of 52 responses to the pupils' online questionnaire and 19 responses to the staff online questionnaire.
- The inspection team examined data about pupils' achievement, behaviour and attendance. They looked at the school's self-evaluation and school development plans, reviewed minutes of the meetings held by the governing body, scrutinised pupils' work in lessons and carried out a book scrutiny from core subjects to validate the school's assessment of pupils' progress.
- The inspection team checked the school's records on safeguarding and child protection.

Inspection team

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