

Oak Bank School

Sandy Lane, Leighton Buzzard, LU7 3BE

Inspection dates

7–8 July 2015

Overall effectiveness	Previous inspection:	Not previously inspected as an academy
	This inspection:	Outstanding 1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school.

- Governors, the executive headteacher, head of school and senior leaders have created a culture in which all members of staff have very high ambitions for every pupil. Consequently, pupils' achievements get better and better.
- The curriculum is outstanding. It prepares pupils extremely well for their next steps in education and life. The range of courses available and subjects studied are constantly extended so that every pupil has the opportunity to excel or pursue an interest to as high a level as possible.
- Pupils' learning accelerates in English and mathematics following entry to the school. The large majority make up ground lost previously and make better than expected progress, particularly in mathematics and reading. Some achieve good GCSE qualifications in Year 9 and Year 10 in mathematics. A few do not make quite such good progress in writing.
- Excellent teaching is characterised by outstanding relationships between staff and pupils and high expectations of both behaviour and academic achievement. This accelerates learning. Pupils start to believe in themselves because they trust their teachers' judgements.
- Teachers plan work that is very well matched to pupils' interests and needs. Excellent verbal and written feedback means pupils are very clear as to how they are doing and how they could do even better.
- Outstanding careers guidance and excellent partnership working with colleges and other providers help pupils gain high levels of work-related skills and qualifications. This all helps them to make the right choice for their future employment or training.
- Almost all pupils make outstanding progress in managing their own behaviour and in their attitudes to learning. Staff manage any difficult behaviour by pupils extremely well, so that it does not interrupt the learning of others.
- Pupils are polite and respectful towards each other, staff and visitors. Their behaviour around school, in lessons and at courses off-site is excellent. Outstanding pastoral care provides pupils with highly effective strategies for dealing with their anxieties and emotions.
- Individual pupils who find attending school more difficult benefit from excellent support from the behaviour support service and home tuition team. This means they too achieve consistently well and engage increasingly in school activities. However, a small number of pupils do not attend well because they have received temporary transport bans.
- The school is meticulous in carrying out the checks that it should and keeps pupils very safe. An excellent personal social and health education ensures that pupils have a very good understanding of personal risk and safety. Pupils say they feel very safe. Parents unanimously agree that their children are safe and very well cared for.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is exceptional. They are supported to high levels of personal and social awareness. The school's values of respect and tolerance for diversity are promoted in everything that it does.
- Governors are highly knowledgeable and use their skills and first-hand experience of the school to hold leaders to account highly effectively. They, and the senior leadership team, check rigorously on the quality of teaching and how it is improving.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons across all the age groups taught by the school, except Year 11, who had already left the school at the time of this inspection. All visits to lessons were carried out with senior leaders. Inspectors also walked around the school with senior leaders to explore different aspects of its work and visited pupils learning off-site in alternative provision used by the school.
- Inspectors looked in detail at work in pupils' books and folders. They talked with pupils about their experiences at the school and how well they thought they were doing.
- Inspectors held meetings with governors, the executive headteacher, head of school and the new headteacher designate. They also talked with middle managers, including the school's key stage managers and transition manager, to consider how well management at each level was driving the school forward and had an accurate view of its work.
- Inspectors examined a range of documents about the school's work, including its self evaluation and improvement planning, information about pupils' behaviour and attendance, as well as the ways in which the school checks on pupils' progress.
- An inspector visited an example of the school's external provision. They examined documentation relating to this provider and other providers including evidence of pupils' progress on these courses, their attendance and how the school checks on pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance.
- There were 14 responses to the online questionnaire (Parent View). Inspectors spoke with individual and groups of parents on the second day of the inspection. They also considered 35 questionnaire responses submitted by staff.
- The school provided evidence as to the work and progress of Year 11 pupils. The second day of the inspection was a parental consultation day, when lessons were not happening. An inspector visited alternative provision and held meetings on this day, as well as carrying out scrutiny of work.

Inspection team

Susan Lewis, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Lynne Thorogood

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Oak Bank School is a special school which caters for pupils who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties, including associated challenging behaviours. Many have additional special educational needs such as autistic spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit and hyperactive disorders (ADHD) and speech, language and communication difficulties.
- Oak Bank School converted to become an academy school in November 2013. When its predecessor school, Oak Bank School, was last inspected by Ofsted, it was judged to be good.
- Places at the school are commissioned by local authorities. Most pupils come from Central Bedfordshire. Others come from Luton, Milton Keynes, Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational need or an education, health and care plan. Almost all pupils are of White British backgrounds and none speaks English as an additional language. Most pupils are boys.
- Pupils arrive at the school at any point in their educational career and can arrive as late as Year 11. About a third of all pupils on roll have arrived after the start of this financial year. Many pupils have had disruptions to their education before attending Oak Bank. Most have been excluded from their previous school or have had a 'managed move' to Oak Bank to prevent exclusion. Some have been school refusers or attended school rarely.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils (those supported through the pupil premium) is considerably above the national average. Pupil premium funding is received by the school to help those pupils known to be eligible for free school meals or looked after by the local authority.
- The school enters some pupils for GCSE in Years 9 and 10 if it feels they are ready or it will help them to gain confidence in their abilities.
- The school makes use of an extensive range of alternative provision. Providers include Force 5, C and G Plastering Academy, Shuttleworth College and Bedford College.
- The executive headteacher is also executive headteacher of the Academy of Central Bedfordshire and is in school for half of each week. The current head of school is about to retire. The head of school designate is already working in school to support the school's future development and ensure that the transition to new leadership is smooth.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to work with placing authorities and with parents and pupils to ensure that pupils' attendance and achievement is not hindered by their transport being withdrawn.
- Raise achievement in writing to at least as high as in mathematics and reading by ensuring that:
 - pupils have more opportunities to write at length and particularly in subjects other than English
 - staff use a broader range of activities to enthuse pupils about writing, including the use of different technologies where these might meet pupils' specific difficulties and needs.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Outstanding leadership by the executive headteacher and the head of school has ensured that the school has gone from strength to strength so that now all aspects of its work are outstanding. Senior leaders have established a culture of very high expectations for all pupils, whatever their needs or age in all subjects. They have put into place rigorous checks on the quality of teaching and how it affects pupils' learning. This, plus excellent training opportunities and support from middle leaders, has ensured that the quality of teaching is now outstanding.
- Senior leaders have an excellent grasp of the quality of the school's work, including how well every pupil is doing and what would help them to achieve even more. They have established very effective systems for checking on pupils' progress and for evaluating whether it is good enough. Regular meetings consider the progress of pupils and ensure that if it starts to slow staff take swift action to help pupils catch up.
- Middle leaders are very effective. The special educational needs coordinator, for example, ensures that all staff are aware of any additional learning needs that pupils might have and the teaching strategies that they should use to support such pupils. She checks carefully on whether interventions are working. As a result, pupils who have disabilities or additional special educational needs such as ASD or ADHD also make outstanding progress. Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 managers work highly effectively together to ensure that transitions within and between departments are smooth and that staff are skilled in how to manage each pupil's learning before they arrive in their subject or class.
- There are excellent arrangements to support pupils' transition into the world of work or college. The school uses a range of part-time alternative placements to enrich its curriculum and offer pupils opportunities to acquire vocational skills relevant to future employment or training. Leaders check meticulously on pupils' safety, attendance and behaviour at these placements as well as on their progress.
- In 2014, all Year 11 pupils progressed to college placements or to apprenticeships. This year almost all pupils similarly were already placed on employment or training of their choice at the time of the inspection. The school checks carefully on how well their leavers do after Oak Bank and are rightly proud of the proportions that go on successfully to complete apprenticeships or Level 3 courses and above.
- Pupils achieve so well because leaders and teachers are so skilled at finding the key to helping them to re-engage with education. Staff are deployed highly effectively as key workers. The behaviour support and home tuition team are managed highly effectively to ensure families and pupils have the support they need, and that all pupils have the opportunity to succeed. Equality and diversity are promoted very well because of this. Discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.
- The curriculum is planned very carefully to inspire pupils to learn. Younger pupils experience themes and topics that motivate them to want to come to school, where their parents say they have found it hard to get them there previously. For example, pupils take part in a range of activities such as caring for animals on site at the school and growing and selling vegetables. There is an appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy for all. The school is ever reflective on this. For example, in September the timetable will extend further with additional emphases on literacy across the curriculum in subjects such as humanities. Excellent provision in physical education, art, design and technology also supports pupils' progress in other subjects such as science. Personal, social and emotional education provides for their emotional needs very well indeed.
- The curriculum is enriched with many opportunities for pupils to take part in visits and in community events with other schools and community partners such as homes for the elderly. Pupils learn to make positive contributions through such links and to extend their understanding of others' diversity and needs. This all helps to set them up very well for life in modern Britain.
- School leaders ensure teachers have good access to the information they need about pupils, including their progress to date in all subjects. Their links with other schools and colleges, including other special and secondary schools, mean they learn from one another about best practice in tracking and assessment.

- All requirements regarding safeguarding are met. Leaders have developed excellent partnership working with other agencies such as social care and education welfare services. They carry out all the required checks meticulously and staff have received an extended range of training. A key worker system means that pupils always have someone to turn to. Pupils value this hugely, saying that they know staff will always have time for them.
- Leaders work tirelessly with pupils and families to improve attendance and are highly successful in re-engaging almost all pupils with school. This is because of the flexibility of programmes they can offer both onsite and through home tuition, alternative placements and school if necessary. This all gains pupils' and families' trust. Parents say that the school has transformed their children and their own lives, because they know their children are safe and now have a future.
- The school works very well in partnership with local authorities and other agencies such as social care and attendance officers to keep pupils' safe and to get them into schools. However, at the time of the inspection a small number of pupils were not able to attend school because of a transport ban for poor behaviour. The school is working urgently with local authorities to address this and particularly to ensure that taxi drivers and escorts have regular training to help them and pupils to build effective relationships.
- The school uses pupil premium funding very effectively to ensure that disadvantaged pupils have any additional resources and experiences that they need so that they achieve at least as well as their classmates. Pupils have access to a range of additional therapies and courses as well as one-to-one support for literacy for example. The small amount of primary sports funding is used effectively to enable pupils to develop their skills in team and other sports such as Bocce clubs.
- The local authority continues to provide advice and support for the school and relationships are strong. The school draws well on other local schools and colleges to extend its practice and to support individual teachers and pupils. It also provides high quality support itself to other schools, particularly for positive behaviour management, that is highly valued.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - Governors have played a major and effective role in improving this school so that its work is outstanding. They have a wealth of experience and skills which support their work well so that they challenge leaders through asking searching questions about achievement and provision.
 - Governors know the school and the quality of teaching very well. They visit regularly to see how well it is doing and to talk with pupils and staff. They also check very carefully that all the required welfare health and safety procedures are carried out.
 - Governors check thoroughly on how additional government funding, such as the pupil premium, is used and the difference it makes. They also ask searching questions about other interventions and achievements. They are ever ambitious for the school to achieve even more. They have a good understanding of data about pupils' progress and attendance, so that they can check that all pupils are doing as well as they should.
 - Governors make sure that staff performance and pay awards are clearly linked to pupil outcomes and progress and that only good performance is rewarded. They are determined that the school's high standards be maintained and are always vigilant in asking questions about learning in school and in off-site provision.
 - Governors make sure that all the statutory safeguarding regulations are exceptionally well met and pupils' emotional wellbeing and safety are always priorities.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Almost all pupils turn around their behaviour and attitudes to learning at the school, so that all leave with worthwhile qualifications and ready to continue learning or employment elsewhere. Pupils' attendance improves dramatically so that a high proportion of pupils who have refused to attend school previously, or only attended part-time, now come to school as regularly as

or more than others of their age.

- However, attendance is still lower overall than that expected because so many pupils join the school during the school year. The school is constantly settling new pupils in and putting programmes into place to re-engage them with school. A similar trend is evident with behaviour and fixed-term exclusions. As pupils settle into the school and adjust to its rules, incidents reduce considerably in severity and frequency for individual pupils and in stark contrast to those in previous placements. This is because of the skilled support provided by staff that helps pupils to reflect on their behaviour and gives them strategies for managing it.
- Behaviour is so good because of the excellent relationships staff build with pupils so that staff gain pupils' trust. The school's values of equality, courage, respect, friendship, inspiration, determination, caring and excellence are ever prominent, building tolerance and resilience in all. Work in subjects such as English constantly helps pupils to consider their own and others' emotions and ensures pupils find different ways of explaining how they feel.
- Pupils' behaviour when on their off-site provision is also outstanding because the school works so carefully with these providers to ensure there are similarly high expectations and consistency of approach. The excellent matching of courses to pupils' interests and needs mean that pupils are highly motivated on such courses and appreciative of the skills they are learning. Pupils build their resilience on such courses and take their skills into other aspects of their lives.
- Pupils are highly reflective about their behaviour and very clear as to what they need to improve further. Their spiritual development is excellent as a result, as they show a much deeper understanding of themselves and others including others' beliefs and lifestyles. Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is also outstanding because of the range of experiences pupils take part in and the ways in which these are used to help pupils to understand why, for example, laws and rules are necessary.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Detailed risk assessments and checks around all activities and pupils underpin this. Pupils' safety is paramount in this school, as is their emotional well-being and staff work extremely well with each other and with other agencies and providers to embed this and ensure a consistent approach.
- All the required checks on staff and governors are meticulously carried out, including for external providers. Staff are extremely well trained both in relation to child protection and behaviour management. Any need to physically intervene is recorded in detail and reflected on carefully both by the staff concerned and by the senior management. Class groupings are carefully arranged so that new arrivals do not disrupt the learning and safety of others but have equal access to everything that they should. The behaviour support service and the home tuition service check carefully on the safety of any pupil who is having difficulty attending school regularly and provide daily support to home.
- Bullying and the use of inappropriate language are rare because staff are ever vigilant and pupils know that the school will always respond to this. Pupils say that when it does occasionally occur staff deal with it 'absolutely fairly' and their parents agree.
- A very strong personal and social skills programme, alongside work in science, cycling safety and accredited courses such as ASDAN and COPE ensure that pupils have an excellent understanding of e-safety and of personal risk and have strategies to deal with this. The very strong transition programme put in place at Key Stage 4 for all pupils ensures they are able to travel safely to their next placement and understand their own personal support and behaviour needs.
- Transport staff have received training in the past and the very large majority of pupils travel safely to school and their alternative provision. Changes in some pupils' transport arrangements means that a very few pupils have had incidents which have resulted in short-term bans from transport so that they do not currently have transport to get them into school. School staff and parents try to get pupils in wherever possible but this does have an impact on individual pupils' progress. The school is already working urgently with the local authority to ensure that such pupils have more skilled management on taxis and are able to get to school regularly.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding because the leadership has ensured that all staff are highly skilled in managing the learning and behaviours of pupils who have social, emotional or mental health needs. The leadership of the special educational needs coordinator also ensures that where pupils have additional special educational needs, such as ASD, staff understand how to promote these pupils' learning best. Every pupil has a personal support plan that identifies to all how this should happen.
- The ways in which the school inducts its new pupils and its key-worker system mean that all pupils quickly develop a trusting relationship with someone that enables them to feel safe to learn. Staff plan activities carefully that build on what is known about pupil progress to date so that the work is generally well matched to challenge pupils to achieve even more.
- The teaching of mathematics, reading and writing has been strengthened recently by the introduction of literacy and numeracy sessions at the beginning of every day, in addition to the specialist English and mathematics programmes. This means all staff are effective in supporting literacy and numeracy skills and, increasingly, take these needs into account in other subjects. This has been particularly successful in reading where achievement is outstanding and teaching is consistently outstanding.
- The teaching of writing is good and particularly in English and in Key Stage 2. There is systematic support for spelling and for vocabulary throughout the school. However, opportunities to write and particularly at length or in different ways are less developed in some other subjects. While pupils use technology effectively to research for example, they have fewer opportunities to use this and other devices for writing.
- Animal care, physical education, art, music and design technology are used very well to excite and build on pupils' interest and give them a strong sense of achievement. Videos and photographs support pupils evaluating both their own work and that of others very well, so that they are able constructively to challenge each other, as well as themselves, to do even better.
- Teachers often use probing questions extremely well to help pupils to solve problems for and to develop their ideas further. Excellent verbal feedback and high quality marking mean that pupils are very clear as to how well they are doing and what they need to think about next. Homework is increasingly well used to support learning and involve families as pupils settle into school.
- Staff are usually expert in their subjects but have good opportunities to strengthen their subject knowledge and to keep up to date through the school's partnership working and particularly with The Academy of Central Bedfordshire. Where pupils show talents that will enable them to take their learning to a higher level, such as in mathematics, they are provided with extra support to do so. Interventions provided to support the learning of disadvantaged pupils further are checked on carefully for their quality.
- Pupils benefit from expert teaching and support at a range of alternative providers. This is closely monitored and further supported by home tuition or at school so that these pupils achieve very well in higher qualifications for example in equine studies, animal care, health and beauty, plastering and construction.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- Pupils arrive at the school with attainment that is often significantly behind others of their age because of disruptions to their schooling previously. They are often disenchanted and disengaged with education and school assessments on entry show they have often fallen considerably behind previously assessed levels.
- The flexibility of the school's provision means that staff are quickly able to put in just the right programme to motivate almost all pupils and to help them to recognise their own potential and progress. Highly personalised programmes help their behaviour to improve significantly and with it their learning, sometimes in a very short time indeed.

- Pupils in Key Stage 2 enjoy the many opportunities they have to make links between their learning through topics of interest. These allow them to explore subjects such as history, geography and science alongside mathematics and English. Their speaking, listening and communication skills are enhanced considerably and provide a more secure foundation for their literacy skills to improve as a result.
- Pupils make excellent progress in their mathematics skills because of expert teaching and because of the opportunities they have to practise these in other subjects. In their off-site courses they measure, for example, an area of land for planting out crops or building a wall. A few pupils take their GCSE mathematics examination early in Year 9 or Year 10 so that they gain confidence in taking examinations. All pupils who achieved a Grade C last year have taken the higher paper in 2015.
- Pupils make good progress in writing overall and particularly in their functional skills work. However a few could achieve more if they were motivated to write more and had more opportunities to write in different ways, using different technologies or to write at length. Pupils have many opportunities to read for different purposes either in their research work or in fulfilling their assigned tasks. This means they gain confidence in reading and their reading ages improve significantly.
- Pupils achieve particularly well in a range of vocational courses linked to their interests and aspirations from Year 9 such as animal care, health and beauty, motor vehicle maintenance and land-based studies; some have won 'student of the year' awards in their college or course because of the quality of their work and commitment. The school is rightly proud of the excellent support it provides for pupils' next steps.
- The school ensures that every pupil leaves with qualifications that will be valued by employers or colleges and that pupils' personal skills have been sufficiently developed to set them up for their futures. These can range from higher level GCSE qualifications in mathematics and art to Unit awards where pupils have been on the school roll for a very short time. Where pupils arrive with a talent that the school does not usually offer as an option at Key Stage 4, the school buys in tutor support, for example in a modern foreign language, to ensure that pupils have the resources they need to succeed.
- Disadvantaged pupils achieve at least as well as other pupils in the school. The number in recent cohorts are too small to make meaningful comparisons nationally, particularly as many have arrived at the school late in their school careers. However, school records show that the pupil premium money has been used highly effectively to enable these pupils to improve their literacy and numeracy skills and to support their emotional well-being and inclusion. This means that they too make rapid progress in their behaviour, attitudes to learning and in the subjects they study while at the school.
- The school's recent use of key workers and provision of a 'drop-in centre' in a nearby locality where a number of its pupils live is further involving parents so that pupils have high expectations at home and at school of what they can achieve.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement	Description
	Grade 1	Outstanding	An outstanding school is highly effective in delivering outcomes that provide exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils are very well equipped for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 2	Good	A good school is effective in delivering outcomes that provide well for all its pupils' needs. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment.
	Grade 3	Requires improvement	A school that requires improvement is not yet a good school, but it is not inadequate. This school will receive a full inspection within 24 months from the date of this inspection.
	Grade 4	Inadequate	<p>A school that has serious weaknesses is inadequate overall and requires significant improvement but leadership and management are judged to be Grade 3 or better. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p> <p>A school that requires special measures is one where the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the school's leaders, managers or governors have not demonstrated that they have the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This school will receive regular monitoring by Ofsted inspectors.</p>

School details

Unique reference number	140286
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	450340

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	9–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	73
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	John Halstead
Executive Headteacher	Peter Cohen
Head of School	Graham Hesketh
Date of previous school inspection	Not previously inspected
Telephone number	01525 374559
Email address	schooloffice@oakbank.cbeds.co.uk

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