

# Oak Tree School

Truro Business Park, Threemilestone, Truro, Cornwall TR4 9NH

## Inspection dates

21–23 March 2018

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- Leaders and staff are unswervingly committed to ensuring that their pupils succeed. They have created an environment in which pupils thrive, often for the first time in their education.
- The school provides a highly personalised curriculum that is carefully constructed on the basis of a thorough understanding of each pupil's personal needs and academic abilities.
- Teachers are adept at meeting the needs of pupils. As a result of outstanding teaching, pupils make sustained and substantial progress from the moment they join the school.
- Leaders and staff use assessment extremely well to check that pupils are making progress and to plan the next stages of their learning.
- Disadvantaged pupils make excellent progress across the curriculum.
- Universally, pupils' attendance improves while they are at the school. The same is true for their behaviour. Pupils love coming to this school, where their self-esteem and self-confidence grow.
- The provision for special educational needs (SEN) is excellent. All the pupils at the school have education, health and care (EHC) plans, which staff use well to plan pupils' education and to assess their progress.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. They provide the bedrock upon which pupils' outstanding personal development and academic progress are built.
- Leaders have an excellent understanding of their school through accurately evaluating the standard of education it provides. One aspect of the school's development planning – setting priorities for pupils' achievement – is not sharp enough.
- Middle leadership roles, such as those of subject coordinators, are relatively new. Although they are already having a positive impact, these roles are not yet fully developed.
- The proprietor and school leaders understand the independent school standards well. As a result, they are met in full.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## **Full report**

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
  - the roles of middle leaders continue to develop so that they play a fuller part in the overall leadership of the school
  - leaders identify priorities for improving pupils' achievements more sharply in the school's development planning.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

### Outstanding

- School leaders, supported by the proprietor, are unfaltering in their commitment to securing an outstanding education for their pupils, whatever their needs or past educational history. This highly developed moral purpose shines through all aspects of the school's work and is shared by all staff. As a result, pupils make substantial and sustained progress from the moment they join the school.
- Leaders are highly ambitious for pupils' futures. They have developed a curriculum that is well designed to meet the needs, abilities, aptitudes and interests of pupils. Pupils thrive as a result. For many, this is a new experience, given their highly disrupted educations prior to joining the school.
- The school's use of assessment is exemplary. Teachers make accurate assessments of pupils' achievement, which are checked by leaders to ensure that the system is robust and of high quality. Leaders are fully informed about pupils' progress and can supply teachers with meaningful information upon which to plan for pupils' personal and academic development.
- The provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities is very strong and well led. All pupils have EHC plans, which are used very effectively to ensure that pupils' needs are met. The special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) works closely with the school's educational psychologists to develop an in-depth understanding of each individual pupil. This means that they can provide teachers and other staff with precise and useful advice on how to meet the needs of pupils in the classroom and beyond.
- Staff morale is extremely high. Staff value the programme of training and the supportive approach that leaders take to performance management. Training, for example in meeting the needs of pupils with autism spectrum disorder, is clearly having an impact in the classroom. Staff are unhesitatingly positive about the leadership of the school and the support that leaders provide them.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well. This aspect of pupils' education is woven through all the school's work and closely monitored by school leaders. For example, pupils develop a good understanding of the major world religions through regular assemblies and the work they do in citizenship and personal, social and health education lessons. Consequently, pupils have a good understanding of values such as democracy and tolerance and are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- The school's strong curriculum is supported by a wealth of extra-curricular activities, including some that take place at weekends and during the school holidays. These activities play a big role in consolidating the great strides that pupils take in their personal development while they are at the school.
- The majority of pupils at the school are disadvantaged, although the school only receives funding for children looked after. This funding is used very effectively and children looked after make at least as strong progress as other pupils with the same starting points.
- Leaders demonstrate their capacity to secure further improvement by their response to the areas for improvement identified at the previous inspection. For example, provision

for science and design and technology has improved markedly as a result of new facilities and the employment of specialist teaching staff in these subjects.

- School leaders and the proprietor have an excellent understanding of the school's many strengths and the areas it needs to develop. This strong self-evaluation informs the school's development planning effectively, although the identified priorities in one area – pupils' achievement – are not sharp enough.
- Middle leaders, such as subject coordinators, are developing their roles and starting to have an impact in their particular areas of responsibility. Senior leaders recognise that, as the school continues to expand, this aspect of the school's work needs to develop and be consolidated further.

## **Governance**

- The proprietor of the school, Acorn Care and Education Group, has ensured that the leaders and managers of the school have the knowledge and understanding that enable them to make certain that they meet the independent school standards and associated requirements in full. Moreover, the proprietor has a secure and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for future development.
- Although it is not the registered proprietor, the school has a governing body, chaired by the assistant director for education of Acorn Care and Education Group. This body provides a good level of support and challenge to leaders, holding them robustly to account for the school's achievements. The headteacher provides them with regular high-quality reports on the school's performance.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders have established a strong culture of safeguarding, characterised by high levels of vigilance. Highly knowledgeable leaders and staff work well together to keep children safe. All staff have a good understanding of their responsibilities. They are well informed about current issues, such as child sexual exploitation and the 'Prevent' duty.
- Regular weekly safeguarding updates are highly valued by staff. They feel that any concerns they raise are taken seriously and that information about any ongoing safeguarding concerns is shared appropriately, when and where necessary.
- Pupils say they feel very safe. They can, for example, describe clearly how to stay safe online. Their parents and carers agree strongly that they are safe at school, as the results from Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, indicate. Well-developed routines at the start and end of the day ensure that pupils arrive at and depart from the school safely and calmly.
- When staff use restrictive physical intervention (restraint) to prevent pupils' behaviour posing a danger to themselves or others, it is monitored closely and well. The analysis of such occasions is extremely thorough, another area in which the school's self-evaluation is exemplary. The number of occasions when restraint is used is falling and so is the average duration for which it is used.

- The school has a thorough safeguarding policy that pays due regard to the guidance issued by the secretary of state. It is published on the school's website, as required.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

## Outstanding

- Teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff help pupils to thrive. Pupils make extremely strong progress from the moment they start at the school.
- Teaching is characterised by thorough planning to ensure that it meets each individual pupil's needs. Building on high-quality information provided by the school's assessment system and the SENCo, teachers have a deep understanding of their pupils. This is reflected in their planning and their understanding of what the next stages of each pupil's learning needs to be.
- Teachers and other staff plan lessons that provide well-structured sequences of learning that consolidate core skills highly effectively. They provide pupils with excellent support to improve their work. In response, pupils make quick progress in consolidating their reading, writing and mathematical skills across the curriculum. This consolidation of core skills is particularly important, as all the pupils who join the school are performing at levels well below what might typically be expected for their age due to highly disrupted educational experiences up to that point.
- Staff use accurate assessment extremely effectively to identify gaps in pupils' learning and to plan learning that will quickly help pupils to catch up. In lessons, they use ongoing assessment well to ensure that time is used productively in helping pupils to progress.
- Teachers are adept at promoting pupils' positive attitudes to learning. They quickly establish strong relationships with their pupils, which provide a solid foundation upon which to build progress in personal development and academic achievement. They use questioning well to support this.
- Teaching helps pupils to enjoy their learning, which, for many pupils, is a new experience, given their fractured experiences of education so far. As a result, pupils' attendance, behaviour, self-esteem and self-confidence all improve.
- Teachers manage pupils' behaviour extremely well. They are skilful in assessing how and when to intervene to have the most positive impact.
- Leaders and teachers deploy teaching assistants and other staff thoughtfully. Teaching assistants support teaching very well and make important contributions to pupils' personal development and academic progress.
- The school provides parents with clear, detailed and informative reports about the progress their children are making. These reports are further indication of the depth of understanding teachers and other staff have of pupils' needs and how to meet them.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

## Outstanding

### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils join Oak Tree School with few or no positive experiences in education. Many have

attended numerous schools or alternative providers but have not prospered there. Consequently, school leaders put a great deal of successful effort into ensuring that this pattern does not repeat itself.

- Staff work exceptionally well to develop pupils' self-esteem, self-confidence and self-awareness. Thus, pupils' readiness to learn is quickly established and they become much more positive about what education can provide them. They celebrate their own successes and those of their classmates. Kindness is encouraged and the school's 'kindness coordinator' regularly praises pupils for being considerate to others.
- Pupils state enthusiastically how much the school has helped and supported them to develop, compared with previous schools they have attended. Parents are equally positive about the impact the school's work has had on their children.
- Pupils report little or no bullying. They say staff deal with it well on the rare occasions it occurs. School records confirm both these views. Nonetheless, leaders and staff are not shy about tackling issues when necessary, such as the use of homophobic language.
- The school's curriculum, especially its emphasis on outdoor education, makes a strong contribution to promoting pupils' physical, mental and emotional well-being.
- The curriculum also strongly promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Through a wide range of activities, pupils develop their understanding of themselves, modern Britain and the wider world. They enjoy this aspect of their education very much.

## **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' behaviour improves dramatically while at the school. Staff are highly skilled at managing pupils' behaviour and the longer a pupil is at the school, the better their behaviour becomes. Pupils are given very effective help to regulate their own behaviour and most become much better at doing this over time. This fundamental change in pupils' experience of education is a crucial reason why they make much better progress at the school than in previous settings.
- Many pupils arrive at the school with a long history of multiple fixed-term and permanent exclusions behind them. Although leaders use fixed-term exclusions where appropriate for a small number of pupils, they occur at a very much lower rate than pupils experienced earlier in their education.
- Without exception, pupils' attendance improves when they join the school, including those who had previously refused to go to school. Pupils clearly value their education, and many are attending very well for the first time in their school careers because of the effective way the school meets their needs.
- The rates of absence and persistent absence are much lower than average for special schools. As a result of better attendance, pupils are able to make much faster academic progress than they did earlier in their education.

## Outcomes for pupils

## Outstanding

- All current pupils are making far better progress at the school than they had done in previous educational settings. The vast majority are making rapid, substantial and sustained progress from their low levels of attainment on entry into the school.
- Typically, pupils join the school with large gaps in what they know, understand and can do. Outstanding teaching ensures that these gaps are rapidly identified and closed. As a result, pupils make very fast progress in key skills. Standardised tests of reading, writing and comprehension ages, for example, show that pupils develop much faster than would normally be expected.
- In English, pupils make outstanding progress in their writing, developing increasing sophistication of vocabulary and sentence structure. In mathematics, they develop security and accuracy in calculation and a good grounding in key mathematical concepts, such as trigonometry or the use of indices. This pattern of outstanding progress is repeated across the whole curriculum.
- All pupils at the school have EHC plans. Because their needs are met, they make excellent progress against the targets outlined in their plans.
- Disadvantaged pupils – the majority of pupils in the school – make outstanding progress from low starting points. Across the curriculum, they make progress at least equivalent to that of other pupils with similar starting points. The same is true for the smaller number of children looked after.
- Pupils are well supported to enter a range of public examinations with success. These include unit awards, functional skills, entry-level qualifications and, for the most able, GCSEs. As a result of the support they receive, pupils are attaining at much higher levels than before they joined the school.
- Due to the effective teaching of core skills and the outstanding progress they make, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training or employment. As a relatively new institution, the school has not had sufficient numbers of pupils leaving after Year 11 to make meaningful observations about their destinations.

## School details

Unique reference number	140942
DfE registration number	908/6003
Inspection number	10041380

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	35
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Group
Headteacher	Mike Deacy
Annual fees (day pupils)	£37,950–£100,950
Telephone number	01872 264 221
Website	<a href="http://www.oaktreeschoolcornwall.co.uk">www.oaktreeschoolcornwall.co.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:oaktreeschool@acorncare.co.uk">oaktreeschool@acorncare.co.uk</a>
Date of previous inspection	17–19 March 2015

## Information about this school

- Oak Tree School is an independent special school situated on the outskirts of Truro. It is one of a number of schools operated by the proprietor, Acorn Care and Education Group. The school has a board of governors, chaired by the assistant director of education, but it is not the named proprietor on the register of independent schools.
- All pupils who attend the school have EHC plans. All pupils are placed at the school by the relevant local authority, with the vast majority by Cornwall Council.
- The school caters for pupils who have a range of SEN and/or disabilities. These include social, emotional and mental health needs, specific and moderate learning difficulties and



speech, language and communication needs. An increasing number of pupils have autism spectrum disorder.

- The school's previous standard inspection took place on 17–19 March 2015, when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- The school does not use alternative providers. Pupils undertake a wide variety of activities away from the school site, such as outdoor education, but are accompanied by staff from the school at all times.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspector met with the headteacher, senior leaders and other staff throughout the inspection. He also met with the assistant director of education for Acorn Care and Education Group. He held discussions with representatives of Cornwall Council, which places the vast majority of the pupils at the school.
- The inspector visited lessons, where he looked at pupils' work and talked to them about their learning. He also talked with a group of six pupils about their experiences at the school.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of pupils' work across a variety of subjects. He also examined documents provided by the school relating to all aspects of its work, including records of behaviour, attendance and academic achievement. In addition, he looked in detail at the school's safeguarding records, including the single central record that records the pre-employment checks made on teachers and other staff.
- In making his judgements, the inspector took account of 12 responses to Parent View, including 10 free-text comments, and 34 responses to the staff survey. In addition, he spoke to three parents on the telephone.

## Inspection team

Stephen Lee, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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