

Oak Bank School

Sandy Lane, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 3BE

Inspection dates

26–27 March 2019

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
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Leaders and governors have maintained and built upon the many successes identified in the previous inspection. The quality of education is outstanding and life changing.
- Governors are highly experienced and effective. They are dedicated to the continued success of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
- Pupils behave exceptionally well. Many have not had success in their education elsewhere. Pupils rebuild their trust and desire to learn. They flourish, gaining confidence and self-esteem.
- Adults are highly trained to meet the needs of individuals. Many go above and beyond the expectations of their roles to ensure that pupils attend school and achieve extremely well.
- Teachers and support staff build positive relationships with pupils. They use information very well to provide pupils with personalised challenge and support across subjects. Pupils make considerable progress from their individual starting points.
- The curriculum is interesting and wide-ranging. The external provisions pupils attend are thoughtfully matched to their interests.
- Many local authorities commission places for pupils at the school. There remain more opportunities for leaders to share practice and develop highly effective working relationships.
- Pupils achieve exceptionally well academically, from often lower-than-expected starting points. They leave school at Year 11 or after sixth form with relevant qualifications and work experience that help them gain employment.
- Safeguarding practices are effective. Key workers foster highly positive relationships with parents and carers and work closely with them to promote actively pupils' safety and welfare.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is carefully considered. Pupils value the education they receive and the opportunities to discuss issues in a relevant way.
- The system to manage pupils' behaviour is highly effective. Staff apply the rules and expectations consistently. Rewards are highly sought after and valued by pupils. As a result, most pupils make exceptional personal progress over time.
- Leaders use a wealth of information to measure the progress pupils make. New systems are in place to consider pupils' social and emotional progress. The full impact of this work has not yet been realised.
- Parents value the education and care that their children receive. They know that they often transform children's lives.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue with work to measure the progress pupils make in their social and emotional development and use this to increase opportunities for even more individual success.
- Continue to establish mutually effective relationships and sharing of good practice with the local authorities who commission places for pupils at the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- Leaders at all levels work as a cohesive team to deliver a high-quality education and welfare provision. Pupils are at the centre of all that governors, leaders and staff do. Pupils settle well and make impressive personal and academic progress.
- The executive headteacher is ably supported by two highly experienced deputy headteachers, together with other equally dedicated senior leaders. As a senior team, they work tirelessly to ensure that every pupil is known well, kept safe and provided with a curriculum that helps individuals re-engage with school life. Leaders' vision is demonstrated in well-established and highly effective practice.
- Staff are overwhelmingly proud to work at the school. They recognise the positive improvements since the previous inspection. Staff at all levels are very well trained, and they use their expertise well to build positive and effective relationships with pupils.
- There have been changes in the senior leadership, particularly at the head of school position, since the previous inspection. However, the unwavering ethos, vision and direction that everyone follows have ensured that leadership remains outstanding.
- Leaders provide training and support for other schools, locally and nationally. Leaders have an excellent grasp of providing high-quality education and care for pupils with SEND. They have expertise in and secure knowledge of designing an interesting and personalised curriculum. This, together with a clear and rigorously applied behaviour management system, results in pupils re-engaging with learning.
- The provision of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is excellent. Pupils who responded to their questionnaire agreed that adults listen to them and encourage them to respect people from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally. Pupils have access to a well-designed and appropriate curriculum in religious education, personal development and citizenship. They value opportunities to debate and discuss issues and take advantage of these well.
- Pupils achieve so impressively, because leaders and teachers are skilled at finding ways to help pupils re-engage with education. Staff are deployed highly effectively as key workers. The behaviour support team is managed effectively to ensure that families and pupils have the support they need and that all pupils have every opportunity to succeed. Equality and diversity are expertly promoted.
- Middle leadership is strong. Subject leaders and other middle leaders have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They ensure that the quality of education, support and guidance for pupils remains of a consistently excellent standard.
- The deputy headteacher has established a new and precise system for measuring progress in pupils' social and emotional development. Recently, leaders have started to gather highly effective and useful information from which staff can plan further opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge and skills in self-awareness, relationships and social interactions. This system is currently too new to assess the full impact of its work on raising pupils' personal achievement.

Governance of the school

- Governance is highly effective. The governing body has both the expertise and dedication to hold school leaders effectively to account for pupils' achievement.
- The governing body is ably led by the experienced chair of governors. Minutes of meetings demonstrate that governors are provided with accurate and thorough information regarding pupils' personal and academic achievements. Governors then further challenge and support leaders, so that decisions are made that enable pupils to continue to excel.
- Governors are relentless in seeking new ways to improve the school. The new sports hall is an example of their determination to provide high-quality education for the pupils in their care. Governors ensure excellent value for money.
- Governors recognise that there could be improvements in the working relationships with some of the local authorities that commission places for pupils at the school. As an academy, governors want to ensure that pupils receive the very best provision possible within the local area. They have a strong desire to work well with all local authority partners and schools and are seeking ways to achieve this.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are compliant. The checking of the suitability of staff to work with young people is rigorous. Policy and training reflect the most recent government guidance. Leaders report thoroughly to governors regarding safeguarding concerns, to ensure that the strong culture of keeping pupils safe and well looked after is nurtured further.
- Staff are trained effectively. A culture of child protection is deeply rooted within the school. Staff at all levels know and understand their responsibilities. They report concerns diligently, so that designated safeguarding leaders can carry out their roles effectively.
- Leaders and staff identify appropriately where pupils or families require further help. Staff are vigilant when situations for pupils go wrong, inside and outside the school. They report criminal activity that pupils may have been involved in, or where there have been issues concerning pupils who may be involved in county lines or drugs. Good links with the police service are in place to provide appropriate support and guidance.
- Staff are alert and diligent in their safeguarding roles. The behaviour support workers and pupils' key workers take swift action when a pupil requires support for an emotional or mental health issue that could impact on the individual's safety.
- Staff often go above and beyond to respond to a communication from a pupil, even outside school hours. Staff are diligent in acting on their responsibilities and ensure that they maintain positive relationships with pupils.
- The school has seven trained designated safeguarding leaders. Leaders analyse and check safeguarding records thoroughly so that they can involve external agencies when

necessary. Referrals are conducted in a timely way and always with the best interests of the pupils in mind.

- The use of physical intervention is reviewed regularly. Leaders analyse the information and ensure that staff are very well trained to use the agreed processes. Measures are in place to ensure that pupils are safe, and adults use restrictive physical intervention as a final resort. School records demonstrate that this is the case.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently strong within all subjects and for the different key stages. Teachers and support staff have highly positive relationships with pupils, built on mutual respect. In both academic and vocational subjects, adults have created purposeful learning environments built on pupils working hard and making good progress.
- Pupils' engagement in lessons is high. This is because teachers have considered the right sequences of learning, so that pupils build their skills and abilities. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and involvement in learning. These expectations are consistently applied. Therefore, lessons flow easily and, where pupils find a lesson challenging, there are well-established strategies so that the learning is not disrupted for others.
- The teaching of mathematics is very well considered, from teachers' thorough understanding of pupils' previous achievement information. Learning is then well designed so pupils can make the best progress possible. Often pupils receive one-to-one tuition, which is highly effective. Teachers respond quickly to the individual needs of pupils and change the speed, level of challenge or activity appropriately. Consequently, pupils make consistently good progress in mathematics.
- The teaching of reading is carefully planned across all year groups, so that pupils rapidly gain the skills for and love of reading. High-quality novels and well-chosen texts which are appropriate but often have a lower reading age requirement than the actual age of the reader, are used effectively. Pupils experience success with reading and begin to develop their skills, often after having experienced a long period of finding reading too much of a challenge.
- Pupils are encouraged to produce their best written work in lessons. Pupils present their work well and are diligent when completing tasks. Their work shows that pupils build their writing skills exceptionally well over time. Where pupils use computers to produce stories, as seen in key stage 2, teachers ensure that pupils use the correct vocabulary, grammar and punctuation.
- Support staff are deployed effectively and make a strong contribution to how well pupils learn in lessons. They are skilled and help pupils understand the activities and expectations.
- In subjects such as physical education and animal care, pupils are encouraged to work socially with each other. In these lessons, teachers use the information from pupils' personal support plans to ensure that each pupil continues to develop to meet their social targets.

- In vocational subjects such as construction and bike maintenance, pupils are provided with a wealth of opportunities to gain direct skills for future employment. Older pupils select and use tools safely and skilfully. Currently, some pupils are making bird tables that they sell within the community. In bike maintenance, pupils can use highly technical vocabulary, demonstrating their prior knowledge and understanding effectively. Pupils are gaining in confidence and making excellent progress in these subjects.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Staff give the utmost care and consideration to meeting every pupil's welfare needs. Key workers build trusting relationships with pupils. This results in pupils developing effective relationships with adults and often restoring them to a point at which pupils can re-engage with school life.
- Parents speak enthusiastically about the wealth of assistance that staff provide to families. Many parents reported that staff go above and beyond what is expected. They value the care and guidance their children receive.
- The quality of careers education and guidance is exceptional. Pupils are provided with a wide range of external provision that is carefully and thoughtfully considered with pupils' interests in mind. Consequently, by the time they leave school, pupils mostly have clear pathways into work, college, the sixth form or occasionally apprenticeships.
- Pupils are expected to speak respectfully and with care to each other and adults. The consistent promotion of inclusion and tolerating differences in the school is well established. One feature demonstrating the impact of this work is the absence of any derogatory language or swearing. Pupils understand the codes of conduct and willingly accept the fair and consistent approach of adults to issuing warnings as part of the behaviour management system.
- There are well-established routines at the start of the day. Pupils are greeted warmly. They willingly follow the expectations, handing in their mobile phones and personal items not required over the school day. Breakfast is provided and enjoyed by pupils. The start of the day is positive, friendly and well ordered.
- At the end of every day, pupils take part in the school's excellent enrichment programme, before they return home in taxis. During these times, pupils choose from a wide range of activities where they enjoy social interactions or have time to develop their physical education further. Enrichment time is well designed to develop a positive end to the school day.
- Pupils who completed the pupil questionnaire all agreed that they have an adult that they can talk to if something is worrying them and that teachers listen to them. They mention that bullying does happen at times, but that teachers are good at resolving issues. One comment made summed up many from pupils in the school: 'This is the school that has helped me the most ever.'

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Many pupils have not experienced success in their earlier education settings or have multiple needs that mean they have a distrust of adults and institutions. At Oak Bank School, pupils learn to build trusting relationships. This results in better attendance.
- Attendance remains below the national average. However, some pupils had not attended school regularly for a significant period prior to joining the school. Over this year, the number of pupils who have less than 60% attendance has decreased from 31 to 19. The school works closely with the minority of pupils who have less than 20% attendance. These pupils receive home tuition and access to external provision.
- There are a significant number of pupils whose attendance at Oak Bank School is close to or above the national average and has improved markedly since they joined the school. This is a vast improvement for these individuals. One parent, whose views, expressed the sentiments of others, stated: 'My child looks forward to coming to the school and is always smiling.'
- Pupils are exceptionally polite and well-mannered and demonstrate respect for staff, greeting adults easily and with appropriate humour.
- During the inspection, there was a fire evacuation. Pupils responded swiftly and in an orderly way. They clearly knew and followed the correct procedures. The high standard of pupils' behaviour contributed to the drill being efficiently and effectively executed.
- Gaining a level 2 for good behaviour is seen as a reward that is worth aiming for. Pupils wear their level 2 uniform with pride, and have their name engraved onto a board in the entrance as a mark of their success. This award and the additional privileges it brings often mean that pupils make a permanent and positive change to their behaviour choices. This lasts the remainder of their time in the school. Currently, there are 16 pupils who have earned this status.
- The school's behaviour management records demonstrate that, over time, the need to issue yellow and red warnings for poor behaviour choices diminishes for individuals. The longer pupils attend and stay at school, the better their behaviour becomes. Behaviour incidents in key stages 4 and 5 are virtually non-existent.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Pupils arrive at Oak Bank with attainment that is often behind others of their age because of disruptions in their previous schooling. They are often disenchanted with and disengaged from education. Once settled, most pupils make exceptional progress from their individual, often very low, starting points.
- Published information and comparisons with national averages do not demonstrate the impressive amount of progress pupils make. Pupils sit a wide range of recognised qualifications that prepare them well for the next stage of their education or employment. All pupils achieve a qualification in mathematics and English, from functional skills through to GCSEs. Currently, more pupils in Year 11 are preparing for GCSE English and mathematics than in previous years.

- Younger pupils who join in Years 5 or 6 make rapid progress in reading, writing and mathematics. From their work books, pupils are making very good progress in writing. This year, pupils are sitting the national tests in reading and mathematics by the end of Year 6, which is a significant achievement for these pupils
- In vocational subjects, pupils make excellent progress at the school and in their off-site provisions. Pupils spoken with were highly confident and valued the experience and skills gained. Many secure further training or employment in the subject they have studied, such as plastering, fish husbandry, music technology, sports and fitness and sports leadership.
- Pupils who receive their education through home tutors also attend the off-site provisions. These pupils are provided with the same access to high-quality education as others in the school and their progress is considered carefully so that they make the best progress they possibly can.
- The flexibility and personalised approach to the curriculum mean that staff can quickly direct pupils towards subjects that spark their interest and motivate them. This allows almost all pupils to recognise their own potential and achieve success.
- The high proportion of disadvantaged pupils make similarly impressive progress as their peers. Additional funds are used well to ensure that these pupils achieve well.
- Pupils often make exceptional progress over time in mathematics and English. Consequently, pupils leave with relevant qualifications that allow them to enter sixth form, further education or employment.

16 to 19 study programmes

Outstanding

- Since the sixth form was introduced in 2016, it continues to go from strength to strength. Students who are successful in their interviews are proud to be a part of this provision. They work hard and achieve qualifications that support their entry into college or the workplace.
- Leadership and the quality of teaching in the sixth form are excellent. Leaders are dedicated to ensuring and determined that every student should succeed and have a meaningful career pathway once they leave Oak Bank School.
- The use of a wide range of external providers enables students to study vocational courses regularly each week. The external provision leads pupils directly into work or gaining further skills and qualifications. Staff spoken with from several of the external providers speak highly of the school and its students. One provider stated: 'Oak Bank School is a great school; they do a lot of excellent work.'
- Students who were spoken with or who responded to their questionnaire were positive regarding the information they receive about careers and next steps after they leave the school. They would recommend the school to others and comment highly positively about the quality of teaching they receive.
- Students have aspirational and highly personal learning plans so that they can excel. They are provided with a personalised curriculum that meets their needs, providing suitable challenge and a clear progression pathway. Consequently, students who remain at the sixth form make consistently good and better progress.

- As part of their core learning, students improve their literacy and numeracy through functional skills, GCSE qualifications or other awards. They also continue with their well-being learning programme to enable them to become emotionally resilient and ready for adult life.
- Behaviour is excellent. Students value the education they receive. They are very well respected as individuals. By this stage, many travel to school alone, using public transport or bicycles. Staff provide care and instructions to ensure that their students keep safe when travelling.
- Students continue to learn about keeping themselves safe and healthy, both physically and emotionally. They use the sporting facilities regularly to get fit in the gym or to practise boxing. They are provided with high-quality tuition, often from external visitors and professionals.
- The sixth form continues to grow. The number of students due to start in September 2019 is 15. These students are already well prepared for this next stage in their academic career. The number of students moving on to apprenticeships is starting to increase.

School details

Unique reference number	140286
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10057798

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

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	105
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	9
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Peter Banwell
Headteacher	Peter Cohen
Telephone number	01525 374559
Website	www.oakbank.beds.sch.uk
Email address	schooloffice@oakbank.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	7–8 July 2015

Information about this school

- Oak Bank 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, attention deficit and hyperactive disorders and speech, language and communication difficulties.
- Places for pupils are commissioned at the school by several local authorities, including Central Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Milton Keynes and Luton. All pupils who are referred to the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school has been a stand-alone academy since November 2013. In September

2016, the school added a sixth form and increased the age of pupils taught to 19.

- This is a growing school. Leaders are admitting up to 10 more pupils in September 2019 and will then provide education for 115 pupils.
- Most pupils are from White British backgrounds. Most pupils are boys. There are currently 10 girls. The proportion of pupils who have English as an additional language is in the lowest 20% of schools nationally.
- Pupils arrive at the school at any point in their educational career and can arrive as late as Year 11. Many have had disruptions to their education before attending Oak Bank School. Most have been excluded from their previous school. Some have been school refusers or have attended school rarely.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is above the national average.
- The executive headteacher is also executive headteacher of the Academy of Central Bedfordshire. The executive headteacher is a national leader of education.
- The school makes extensive use of a wide range of external provisions. Providers include Angling for success (A4S), Academy of Central Bedfordshire (ACB), Bryerley Spring Farm, C&G Plastering, Edu Create (EduCr8), Develop, Hockwell Ring, Jam Rock media, Kik Start, Reactiv8, Seeds of Change, Snoosh Performance Gym and Bedford College.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors gathered a range of information to judge the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This included observing learning in a wide range of subjects and throughout the school day, sometimes jointly with school leaders.
- The inspectors spoke with pupils, considered the work they produced in books, and evaluated education, health and care plans and the school's own information to check the progress pupils make over time.
- Meetings were held with the executive headteacher, other senior leaders, middle leaders and staff. A meeting was held with the chair of governors and other representatives of the governing body.
- Inspectors spoke with the director of education from the local authority in Central Bedfordshire. An inspector visited an external provider and held telephone conversations with several others.
- Inspectors looked at a wide range of documents, including plans for future improvement and the school's evaluation of its own performance.
- Policies and procedures for safeguarding pupils were examined, including the statutory information on the recruitment of staff.
- The inspectors spoke with parents on the telephone to gather their views. Parental views were analysed from the 22 responses to Ofsted's online survey Parent View. Seven responses to the free-text service were considered.
- Views were analysed from the 23 responses to the online staff questionnaire and the nine to the pupil questionnaire.
- Inspectors observed pupils' conduct at breaktimes and lunchtimes, as well as at the transition between lessons. The start and end of the school day were also observed.

Inspection team

Kim Hall, lead inspector

Lynda Walker

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2019