

Inspection of Open Box Education Centre

St. John's Road, Epping, Essex CM16 5DN

Inspection dates: 6 to 8 July 2021

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Overall effectiveness at previous
inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent
school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

The Open Box Education Centre is a caring and nurturing school. Pupils have often spent long periods out of full-time education. Staff know this. They provide pupils with opportunities to develop their self-worth and confidence. Pupils feel safe and secure because of the positive relationships they enjoy with their teachers.

Clear routines and expectations ensure that pupils behave sensibly and respectfully. On the occasions when a pupil becomes upset or anxious, staff deal with their concerns calmly and sensitively. During the inspection, pupils were well mannered when talking to inspectors. Pupils willingly shared their work and experiences about attending the Open Box Education Centre.

Pupils are re-engaged into learning through a varied range of activities. The opportunities provided for pupils take account of their own interests. Pupils' participation in these events enriches their enjoyment of school and gives them a greater understanding of what they could achieve.

Parents and carers who spoke to inspectors highly praised the school and what it meant for their children. Many referred to the fresh start it gave their children and the opportunity to start learning again.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

Since the previous full inspection, leaders have designed a curriculum that responds to pupils' individual needs. The curriculum is driven by a clear vision shared by all staff. It aims for every pupil to be prepared for adulthood, equipped with the knowledge and skills that will help them in their next stage of education. Leaders and staff are determined that every pupil will thrive and succeed.

Leaders have improved the ways they assess pupils' starting points. Many pupils have significant gaps in their knowledge. Teachers use the curriculum plans flexibly while ensuring that pupils build their understanding sequentially. Teachers check what pupils know by asking questions and addressing any misconceptions as they occur. Leaders also check pupils' readiness to learn. Staff understand that they need to get this aspect correct. Bespoke learning plans address pupils' social and emotional needs, helping pupils to engage successfully in learning.

Curriculum plans are mostly delivered by teachers who are knowledgeable about their subject. They know about what each pupil needs to cover and understand. Teachers understand how to motivate pupils to learn through carefully chosen strategies. For example, in mathematics, teaching skilfully directed the pupil to explain reasons for moves in a game that deepened mathematical thinking. However, some plans do not have sufficient detail, such as important vocabulary, to ensure that pupils are taught all the things they need to know.

Leaders place a high priority on reading. Where pupils require additional support, help is offered through individualised programmes. Pupils are encouraged to read. A school library is developing the range of texts and materials that appeal to pupils' different interests.

The special educational needs manager ensures that information about pupils' individual needs is shared with staff. Teachers receive support for developing their plans, especially where pupils have high levels of anxiety or low self-esteem. Personalised plans identify the strategies to help pupils learn. This is often provided through one-to-one mentoring support that addresses pupils' needs well.

The well-planned curriculum is enriched with a range of activities and trips. Regular visits to a local centre provide pupils with opportunities to work with farm animals or develop outdoor adventure skills. Pupils often use these experiences to help with ideas for future vocational placements. Trips broaden pupils' horizons, taking them to local places of interest that they have never visited before. A well-thought-out skills for life programme tackles issues about managing conflicts, friendships and mental health. It encourages pupils to develop their understanding of independence and resilience. Careers guidance is a strength of the school. Pupils receive careful attention to help secure the next steps in their education.

The proprietor body delegates much of the day-to-day running of the school to leaders and a board of governors. Governors share leaders' vision through their understanding of the school's ethos and aims. Governors have a range of expertise they bring to this role. However, the approaches they use do not always provide effective challenge for school leaders. They do not gather sufficient information in a timely way to ask probing questions that hold leaders accountable for their actions and decisions.

The proprietor body has ensured that all the independent school standards are met. The school complies with the 2010 Equality Act. The school building is well maintained. It provides a calm and welcoming environment, which is essential for the pupils who attend the school. The school site is safe because health and safety policies and procedures are rigorously followed. The school's website provides parents with the information they require, such as the school's safeguarding policy.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders understand the importance of safeguarding. They make sure that staff are well trained and provide them with important information so that they are vigilant for any signs of concern. Staff understand what to look out for, especially particular risks associated when working with vulnerable pupils. Any concerns reported to leaders are acted upon immediately and recorded accurately. The school business manager ensures that all the checks are made on those who are employed or work in the school.

Pupils learn about keeping themselves safe through the curriculum. Leaders ensure that there is regular communication with parents and carers. They discuss any concerns and ensure that help and support are provided for those who are vulnerable.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- In some subjects, the plans do not provide sufficient information regarding what pupils need to know, such as important vocabulary. This means that not all adults who teach pupils are clear about the key knowledge pupils need at specific times. Leaders must ensure that all plans include the information pupils need to know so that pupils' understanding is secure.
- Governors do not always use the information they receive about the school's progress in a timely way. This means that they are not able to fully check the impact of leaders' actions and hold leaders to account. Governors must ensure that they understand what leaders intend to achieve through their plans so that leaders are rigorously held to account for the improvement to the school.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	144818
DfE registration number	881/6069
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10193495
Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	14
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Open Box Education Centre Ltd
Headteacher	Alison Dolan
Annual fees (day pupils)	£23, 500 to £60,000
Telephone number	01992 577300
Website	www.openboxededucation.org.uk
Email address	info@openboxededucation.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	22 to 24 May 2018

Information about this school

- The school opened in September 2017 after registration with the Department for Education (DfE). The school had been operating prior to that time but had not been registered.
- Open Box Education Centre is registered to provide full-time and part-time education for up to 20 boys and girls aged 14 to 16 years. The school is owned by Open Box Education Centre Limited.
- Pupils attending Open Box Education Centre typically have a range of social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Many have been excluded, or were at risk of being excluded, from their previous school.
- Pupils are referred to the school by their local authority or local secondary schools. Of the 14 pupils currently on roll, 13 have been referred by their local authority. Nine of the pupils are supported by an education, health and care plan. One pupil has been referred by a local school.
- The majority of pupils are from White British backgrounds and speak English as their first language.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- On 22 February 2017, Ofsted conducted a section 97 inspection and inspectors found the provision to be operating as an unregistered school. The DfE issued a warning notice.
- The school had applied to the DfE to register as an independent school in December 2016, before the February 2017 visit. The pre-registration inspection for the school was conducted by Ofsted on 18 July 2017. At that time, three of the independent school standards were judged unlikely to be met in relation to facilities for pupils who become unwell and the suitability of the outdoor space.
- Ofsted conducted a standard inspection of the school in May 2018, and the school was judged to require improvement. Three independent standards were judged as unmet, relating to teaching and the quality of leadership and management. The school submitted an action plan, which was evaluated by Ofsted on 25 January 2019 and judged not to be acceptable.
- Ofsted visited the school in 29 April 2019 to conduct a progress monitoring inspection. All the standards that were checked were met at this inspection.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This inspection was carried out with a day's notice and at the request of the DfE.
- As part of this inspection, we held meetings with the headteacher and special educational needs manager. They are also the designated safeguarding leaders.
- We met with a member of the proprietor body and two representatives of the governing body remotely. We also had calls with a referring body, Essex Statutory Assessment Services, and an assessor from Hertfordshire Regional College. Various documents relating to leadership and management were considered.
- We carried deep dives in English, mathematics, business and personal, social and health education. We met with the subject leaders, visited lessons, looked at a range of pupils' work and met with staff and pupils.
- We spoke to pupils informally in class and around the school at breaktimes. We spoke more formally with pupils to seek their views about the school.
- We scrutinised a range of school documents, including the school's own evaluation and improvement plans, school policies, child protection and safeguarding information, curriculum plans, attendance and admissions registers, and the minutes of the governing body, including the headteacher's report to governors.
- We looked at the school's single central record of checks on the suitability of staff.
- We considered the four responses made by parents to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and the two responses to Ofsted's free-text system. During the inspection, we held phone conversations with some parents and carers. We took account of the nine responses to Ofsted's online staff survey and the one response to Ofsted's online pupil survey.

Inspection team

Steve Mellors, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Hemmings

Her Majesty's Inspector

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