

Inspection of a good school: The Orchard School

Cambridge Road, Canterbury, Kent CT1 3QQ

Inspection dates:

6 and 7 October 2021

Outcome

The Orchard School continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils attend the Orchard with pride. Those who have previously had negative experiences in education or had long-term absences from school begin to re-engage with learning. The well-trained staff make this possible. Pupils feel safe in school. They told inspectors that bullying is not common and, when it does happen, staff deal with it effectively.

Pupils know staff well and trust them. Staff have high expectations of pupils. Teachers' clear and consistent teaching methods encourage pupils to become increasingly determined in their learning. Over time, pupils' behaviour improves and they begin to learn more.

Leaders make decisions based on what is best for pupils. This is at the centre of the school's ethos. Extra support for pupils who have high levels of need is always on hand. This ensures that pupils enjoy school and achieve well.

Pupils are prepared for the next stage of their education well. Those who leave school after Year 11 mostly go on to further education. Staff are rightly proud that all Year 11 pupils who left the school last year are currently in education, employment or training.

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

Pupils learn a wide range of subjects in an ambitious curriculum. Leaders have carefully selected and organised the knowledge that they want pupils to learn. Teachers adapt topics so that pupils develop an interest in different subjects. Teachers in all year groups focus on improving pupils' language and communication skills. As pupils move between year groups, they get better at expressing themselves appropriately, and increasingly develop their independence in learning.

Pupils behave well in lessons. Those who struggle to follow teachers' instructions or find it hard to behave well are supported by staff to learn to make the right choices. When this is not the case, staff intervene quickly. During social times, pupils use the outdoor fitness equipment, play games or sit together in the dining hall. There is a high staff-to-pupil ratio in and out of lessons. This helps pupils feel safe.

Skilled staff provide carefully selected therapies for pupils with more complex needs. Pupils benefit from this extra support. For example, pupils visit the sensory room to reflect on their learning or have play therapy. Leaders know pupils very well and analyse which pupils are accessing therapies and extra support. However, leaders do not always evaluate which therapies help the most.

Reading is a priority in all year groups. In Year 3, pupils are taught phonics in a systematic way. Pupils' books match the sounds that they know. This helps pupils to build their confidence and fluency in reading. Teachers' enthusiasm about books helps pupils to really enjoy story time. Pupils who need extra help in their reading receive carefully targeted support. Some pupils are referred to the 'reading doctor' who helps pupils to catch up in phonics. Older pupils enjoy reading. They are encouraged by teachers to read a wide range of different types of fiction and non-fiction.

Pupils broaden their learning through a variety of activities during the school week. For example, pupils have 'community enrichment' days where they choose from activities such as fishing or forest exploring. Older pupils take part in community projects such as helping to plan the summer fete. Pupils develop their understanding of social issues by completing courses on conservation and bullying awareness. The school uses its links with other external agencies, such as a local youth organisation, to further enrich and broaden pupils' experiences.

A well-designed careers curriculum helps pupils learn about the opportunities available to them. Pupils hear from external speakers about possible careers. In Year 10, pupils complete an internal, supported work placement in school. This helps to introduce them to the world of work.

Staff say that leaders think about their workload and are considerate of their well-being. Staff enjoy working at the school and are extremely committed to caring for pupils.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff understand the importance of being able to identify when pupils may be at risk of harm. Leaders ensure that staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding guidance and know how to report any safeguarding concerns they may have about pupils.

Leaders work well with other agencies to coordinate additional support for pupils who need it. Leaders maintain meticulous safeguarding records. They follow the government's guidance on supporting pupils at school with medical conditions.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Pupils benefit from a wide range of interventions that help them to access the curriculum and learn in the classroom. Leaders' evaluation of these interventions could be developed so that they gain a deeper understanding of which strategies have the greatest effect on pupils' learning. Leaders should sharpen their evaluation of the methods that support pupils' learning so that pupils achieve exceptionally well.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called a section 8 inspection of a good or outstanding school, because it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that a good school could now be better than good, or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the section 8 inspection as a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be good in July 2016.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	119058
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10203126
Type of school	Special
School category	Foundation special
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	107
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Alan Norley
Headteacher	Annabel Lilley
Website	www.orchard-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 and 13 July 2016, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. The school caters for pupils with autistic spectrum disorder and social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- The school does not currently use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders, governors and a local authority representative.
- On the first day of the inspection, inspectors did deep dives in these subjects: early reading, mathematics, science, and personal, social and health education. This meant that in each subject, inspectors met with subject leaders, talked to pupils, visited lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans in other subjects.
- Inspectors considered the views of staff from meetings with groups of staff and from the 26 staff who responded to Ofsted's confidential questionnaire.

- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding records, including the central record of recruitment checks on staff.
- Inspectors considered the views of 16 parents who responded to the confidential Ofsted parental questionnaire.
- Inspectors considered the views of 26 pupils who responded to Ofsted's confidential pupil questionnaire.

Inspection team

Harry Ingham, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Hogarth

Ofsted Inspector

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