

Inspection of a good school: Great Oaks School

Vermont Close, Off Winchester Road, Southampton, Hampshire SO16 7LT

Inspection dates:

16 and 17 November 2021

Outcome

Great Oaks School continues to be a good school. There is enough evidence of improved performance to suggest that the school could be judged outstanding if the inspectors were to carry out a section 5 inspection now. The school's next inspection will be a section 5 inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thoroughly enjoy their time at Great Oaks School. They work hard and are motivated to try their best. They are keen to learn as much as they can and reach their full potential before leaving. They aim high and know that they will be extremely well supported to achieve their aims. Consequently, they thrive. Staff really listen to pupils and understand what they want from their future lives. As a result, where possible, pupils know they can influence their own futures.

Staff work with determination to ensure that all pupils have as many opportunities as possible to experience new activities. Pupils love the wealth of varied, engaging options available that bring learning to life. They participate enthusiastically in activities ranging from bowling, to felt making, to bricklaying. They learn about possibilities they did not know existed for them in the world of work and leisure. The aspirational 'Great Oaks guarantee' ensures all pupils will participate in exciting events and activities in their wider communities.

This is an extremely friendly, welcoming, and caring school. Pupils feel safe and appreciate the considerate help they get from staff. Parents are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One parent told inspectors, 'my child has flown since starting here'.

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

Aspirational leaders strive to provide all pupils with a high-quality education. Leaders have planned a curriculum which, divided into three pathways, caters very well for pupils' different special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders have sensibly organised subjects into six curriculum strands. Within these pathways and strands, pupils follow an individual, carefully created curriculum, based on the essential knowledge and

skills they need to be as independent as possible in life. Consequently, pupils' learning is appropriate and meaningful.

Teachers deliver sequentially planned learning activities which allow pupils to successfully build on what they have learned before. This looks different for every pupil. Although pupils may be learning the same subject, the activities and end goals may be different to those of their classmates because of their individual SEND.

Staff have strong, specialist knowledge of the specific learning needs of their class. Staff work together well, in carefully designed teams, sharing their expertise. As a result, staff have the necessary knowledge and skills to plan and deliver subjects effectively to all pupils, regardless of their SEND.

Staff use a range of assessment systems well to understand what pupils need to learn next. Leaders adapt these systems effectively as new pupils, with differing needs, join the rapidly expanding school.

Pupils consistently achieve exceptionally well. They are fully prepared for their adult lives. If appropriate, staff enable them to gain meaningful accreditations. Pupils proudly told us how these allow them to go onto college and work. To help pupils make informed choices about future placements, they take part in engaging and suitable activities. This allows staff to understand 'where pupils find their joy'. Consequently, pupils leave at the end of Year 11 or sixth form and go onto placements which are right for them. Parents are fully involved in these decisions from an early stage.

Promoting communication is at the core of everything the school does. Skilled staff consistently use a wide range of effective strategies to promote communication across all areas of the school. The most able pupils enjoy learning to sign. They explain that this is so they can 'talk to everyone in school'. Many pupils enjoy reading and are supported very well to enjoy and understand books, despite the difficulties they may have as a result of their SEND.

Pupils behave with high levels of respect for each other and staff, even though some pupils struggle to manage their own behaviour effectively as a result of their SEND. This is a particular strength of the school. Staff have extremely high expectations of pupils' behaviour, alongside a deep understanding of why some pupils may behave in a certain way. Well-trained staff work well together, using thoughtful, carefully considered approaches and strategies. As a result, pupils are supported successfully in learning to manage their own behaviour well in preparation for their adult lives.

Pupils benefit from a wide range of engaging vocational and leisure activities, for example work experience at a zoo or at a foodbank, helping to run a pop-up shop, catering in a café, and developing leadership skills working with a local football club. Staff recognise and celebrate pupils' wider achievements during weekly assemblies.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff know pupils and their families particularly well. If families need extra help, leaders are tenacious in securing this.

Leaders ensure that any referrals or concerns are acted on quickly. Many pupils have several external agencies involved in their lives. Leaders have ensured there are effective, helpful systems in place. These systems allow vital information to be shared appropriately and securely, including between staff on the different school sites.

Staff are well trained and have a deep understanding of pupils' additional vulnerabilities because of their SEND. Teaching pupils how to stay safe in ways they understand is a priority that runs throughout the curriculum.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing pupil numbers, currently, some aspects of the aspirational wider curriculum offer are not available to all pupils. Consequently, not all pupils are able to participate in the wide range of rich experiences which have previously been offered to all. Leaders should ensure that they are able to consistently promote the extensive personal development of all pupils.

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 evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, 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 predecessor school, Great Oaks School, to be good in February 2013.

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	144205
Local authority	Southampton
Inspection number	10203141
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	242
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	40
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Tony Boyle
Headteacher	Andrew Evans
Website	www.greatoaks.school
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Great Oaks School caters for pupils with a range of complex learning difficulties, including autism, and speech and language difficulties. All pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). The school is part of the Solent Special Education Trust, along with one other local special school.
- The school is split over three sites.
- Since the last inspection, the number of pupils on roll has almost doubled.

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 school leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation.

- Inspectors met with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers. The lead inspector also met with the multi-academy trust chief executive officer and trustees, the chair of the governing body, and the lead for SEND from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication, mathematics and leisure. These deep dives included discussions with subject leaders and teachers, lesson visits with leaders, talking to or observing pupils and looking at their work or evidence of their learning.
- The lead inspector spoke to a group of Year 11 pupils and a group of sixth-form students to hear about where they were going onto after leaving school. An adult was present on both occasions.
- Inspectors looked at curriculum plans, work and evidence used to gain pupils' accreditations, and a range of documentation, including for individual pupils. This included EHC plans, behaviour plans and pupil targets.
- To look closely at safeguarding in the school, inspectors spoke to leaders, pupils, staff, governors and trustees. The lead inspector looked at a range of safeguarding documentation and systems, including the school's single central record, which contains details of recruitment checks.
- Inspectors considered 31 responses to the online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text responses. They also considered the views of 17 pupils and 57 staff who completed the Ofsted surveys.

Inspection team

Maxine McDonald-Taylor, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Lee Selby

Her Majesty's Inspector

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