

Inspection of Great Oaks Small School

Jutes Lane, Minster, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 5FH

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 March 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Outstanding**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are proud of their school. They compare their experiences here favourably to those they have had in the schools they attended in the past. Students in the sixth form enjoy the unique environment provided by the surroundings and accommodation they presently occupy, although happily shared that the Farmhouse site also has its benefits. Students are quietly ambitious because staff expect a lot from them. Aspirations are also high for younger pupils at the main school because staff look for the potential in every pupil and work tirelessly to unlock it.

Pupils behave well here, although some do not attend as often as they should, despite the ongoing efforts of leaders and staff. Pupils report that when they feel anxious and have problems, staff listen and are fair and forgiving. Pupils say that they feel free from bullying and that they feel safe here, but 'not enclosed'. Pupils like the breaks they get between lessons. They like cooking and their lunchtimes. They enjoy the fact the school is small, and that staff can be trusted to do what they say they will, and not 'just go off and do nothing'.

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

This is a happy and improving school. One pupil described it as, 'Certainly, a community first, but also very much a good school to be at.' As part of the same discussion, other pupils agreed that the ethos of the school suited them well and shared that they feel staff are there to support them in their learning, but also in understanding the world around them. Inspectors found this to be true.

Leaders and staff place a very high priority on supporting pupils' personal development. This work is led from the top. The headteacher in particular understands that this aspect of the school's provision needs to be exceptional. As a result, pupils' social and emotional, physical and mental well-being is served well by a dedicated and highly effective team of teaching and support staff.

The school's curriculum is very personalised in nature. Pupils in the secondary phase and students in the sixth form follow programmes of study that are tailored to their individual interests and needs. These are closely linked to the national curriculum at key stage 3, evolving to three bespoke pathways by the time students join the sixth form.

Leadership of the curriculum has become more established since the last inspection. Specialist staff ensure that pupils benefit from high-quality teaching. This impacts positively on pupils' attitudes to school and learning, including in the arts, physical education and learning in the outdoor environment.

While pupils' personal development is supported well by the school's friendly and nurturing culture, the formal curriculum is also effective in this respect. A personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme has been adapted specifically to meet the needs of pupils at this school. Sex and relationships education is closely

aligned to PSHE, which is also supplemented by weekly citizenship and 'skills' sessions. These enable pupils to learn about democracy, respect for different cultures and how their social and communication skills impact their relationships with others. Classroom visits during the inspection found pupils to be enjoying these sessions, with pupils confident to discuss issues such as children's rights, listening patiently to differing views and not being afraid to openly disagree.

The breadth of the curriculum meets the needs of pupils well and is ever evolving. Leaders are proud of the school's offer for science, which has grown over recent years and enables pupils to achieve at GCSE and A level. This is particularly impressive in such a small special school, where access to resources is limited. However, recent changes in staffing mean that the expertise available to teach the current range of science qualifications is not as strong as it might be. Leaders have acted quickly to make temporary arrangements but know these are not sustainable in the long term. They are also looking to improve the range of resources, including access to specialist premises, to enable the school's science offer to become more established.

Pupils follow a tailored mathematics and English curriculums throughout their time at the school. While some pupils follow functional skills routes in these subjects, others follow GCSE courses, including in the sixth form, where some students study A-level mathematics. Whatever pathways students follow in the sixth form, the school is successful at preparing them for their next steps in education and training. Destinations after the sixth form included universities, colleges or specialist training providers last year. This year's cohort has similar aspirations.

Staff are happy and proud to work at the school. The confidential staff survey was particularly positive about workload and well-being. Ofsted's parent survey was also mostly positive, with many written responses praising the work of staff, including non-teaching support staff.

The work of the trust board continues to evolve over time. Trustees work in close partnership with the headteacher to ensure that the school meets all of the requirements of the independent school standards successfully. Most trustees are relatively new but are already honing their skills and their understanding of what their duties are. They have attended a range of relevant training and understand that their roles are strategic in nature. Trustees are also mindful of their role in holding leaders to account and in ensuring oversight of the welfare, health and safety of all in the school. This includes making timely decisions to remedy shortcomings in resources available to staff and to ensure that issues raised in the school's most recent fire risk assessment are fully addressed within a sensible time frame.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff fully understand their individual roles in keeping pupils safe, both in and outside of school. They also understand their collective responsibility to work to keep all pupils and students in the sixth form safe. Leaders have created a culture where staff are vigilant and act when they have concerns. Training is up to date and enables staff to understand the additional risks faced by pupils with complex special educational needs and/or disabilities. Checks on adults at the school are comprehensive. Procedures and policies are fit for purpose, including the school's safeguarding policy which is published on the school's website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school's curriculum has evolved over time as the school has expanded. This includes in key stage 4 and the sixth form, where students can now access GCSE and A-level science qualifications. While this is a very positive development, leaders need to ensure that all staff delivering the science curriculum have the specialist knowledge required and that the resources available fully support pupils to achieve as well in science as they can.
- Leaders and trustees take their responsibilities to protect the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff seriously. This includes making the required statutory checks on adults at the school, routine checks on the school's premises and ensuring that risk assessments are in place. The latest fire risk assessment has highlighted some key priorities that need to be addressed as soon as reasonably possible. Leaders and trustees are aware of this. They should now act in a timely manner to rectify these priorities.

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

School details

Unique reference number	133539
DfE registration number	886/6093
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10214655
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	37
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	10
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Trustees of Great Oaks Small School
Chair	Clive Best
Headteacher	Julie-Anne Kelly
Annual fees (day pupils)	£36,000
Telephone number	01843 822 022
Website	www.greatoakssmallschool.co.uk
Email address	office@greatoakssmallschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	30 January to 1 February 2018

Information about this school

- Great Oaks Small School provides education for pupils who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder or social communication disorders. All pupils currently attending the school have an education, health and care plan. Most pupils are placed and funded at the school by a local authority.
- The Board of Trustees of Great Oaks Small School is registered as the proprietor of the school. The board of trustees also provides governance for the school.
- The school rents a suite of rooms at Discovery Park Business Centre, The Gateway, Sandwich, CT13 9FF, where sixth-form students and some pupils in Year 11 study.
- The school does not presently make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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 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 a wide range of meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, curriculum leaders and teaching and support staff. The lead inspector had a meeting with the chair of the board of trustees and two other trustees. He also talked on the telephone to representatives of two local authorities who place pupils at the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, science and personal, social and health education. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils about how teaching in these subjects builds on pupils' knowledge over time.
- Inspectors toured the premises and accommodation on both sites of the school. They checked a range of policies and documents, including the school's single central record. They also reviewed the school's website and other records regarding the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff linked to the independent school standards.
- Inspectors gathered evidence to explore the impact of pupils' behaviour, the school's wider curriculum offer and how leaders support staff with their workload.

- Pupils were talked to throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school. This included two formal meetings with different groups, including students from the sixth form.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted’s online parent survey. Ofsted’s staff survey was also taken into account.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

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