

# Inspection of Oak Tree School

Truro Business Park, Threemilestone, Truro, Cornwall TR4 9NH

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Inspection dates: 13 to 15 July 2022

## **Overall effectiveness**

**Good**

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The quality of education

**Good**

Behaviour and attitudes

**Outstanding**

Personal development

**Outstanding**

Leadership and management

**Outstanding**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

**Yes**

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Strong, trusting relationships between staff and pupils pervade the school. Leaders make sure that pupils feel safe. Most pupils have complex needs. Staff take the time to work out the best ways for pupils to learn. They provide the right pastoral support at the right time. This personalised approach is core to the success of restoring pupils' interest in education.

Leaders carefully craft rich experiences to broaden pupils' personal and cultural horizons. These include talks from local experts, residential trips abroad and learning Japanese. Pupils enthuse about the impressive range of Friday afternoon 'green time' activities. These range from surfing to cooking. They like the way in which staff tailor these so there is something for everyone to take part in.

Pupils have seen improvements in their learning and behaviour since joining the school. This is because leaders set high expectations. They reward pupils for being resilient and doing their best. Pupils like this approach and participate willingly. Bullying is rare. When it occurs, leaders deal with it effectively.

Parents and carers are highly positive about the education their children receive. Many commented on the 'life-changing' impact the school has had on their children.

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

Leaders ensure that they assess pupils' academic and social needs as soon as they begin at Oak Tree. They are quick to identify potential barriers to learning based on pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders coordinate work with specialist staff, including therapists. This is effective in helping pupils settle into school routines quickly. Pupils look forward to lessons. They attend very well, having joined the school after long periods of absence.

Leaders place great importance on reading. All staff sign up to this. They weave reading and key vocabulary into their teaching effectively. This supports pupils' understanding of technical language. Staff have a secure knowledge of phonics. They ensure that pupils read books suited to their needs. This allows them to develop their fluency and expression.

Heads of faculty have crafted an ambitious academic curriculum. They have mapped out the content that pupils will learn as they move up the school. Many lessons connect and build on what pupils have learned before. For example, in science, pupils revisit work on the periodic table to consolidate their understanding of elements. However, the implementation of the curriculum is stronger in some subjects than in others. Where it is less effective, the activities teachers plan do not secure or deepen pupils' learning as well as they could. Consequently, some groups of pupils do not gain the depth of knowledge they should.

Leaders' work to develop pupils' opportunities beyond the academic curriculum is impressive. Staff run a rich array of after-school and weekend outreach activities, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, music, cadets and sporting fixtures. These extend pupils' learning and personal development substantially.

Most pupils engage well with school. Staff take a keen interest in supporting pupils' complex social and emotional needs. They intervene quickly if pupils need support. Staff are excellent role models to pupils. They reinforce positive behaviours and social interactions at lunchtime by joining in with games. Over time, pupils are much more able to regulate their behaviour than they did in the past. Consequently, exclusions and physical restraints significantly reduce over time.

Leaders provide an exceptional personal development programme. The school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education. Staff use scenarios and 'big questions' to teach pupils about topics such as consent and healthy relationships. Leaders link the school's values to fundamental British values. This helps pupils learn about the importance of tolerance and respect for different groups in society. Leaders fulfil the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Leaders are successful in raising pupils' aspirations and life chances. They continue to review and strengthen the careers programme from Year 7 onwards. Pupils receive personalised, unbiased advice about post-16 career paths available to them. Staff find ways to remove barriers that might prevent pupils with SEND from taking part in opportunities such as work experience. Most pupils go on to college or apprenticeships when they leave Oak Tree.

Leaders, including the regional director and the proprietor body, know the school well. They lead with unquestionable dedication. The governance arrangements ensure that leaders are held to account for the quality of education at the school. Leaders continue to meet all of the independent school standards in full.

Leaders and staff work as a united team. Staff are proud to work at the school. Many say that it is like 'one big family'. They report that leaders keep a close check on their workload and well-being.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders understand the vulnerabilities of pupils at the school. They provide regular and pertinent training on key issues, such as county lines and substance misuse. Staff know the signs to look out for when pupils are at risk. Leaders are quick to act on concerns. They work well with local agencies to offer pupils and families the help they need. Staff carry out checks to ensure that adults are safe to work with pupils.

The safeguarding policies and procedures are in line with government guidance. These are published on the school's website.

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

- Leaders have not ensured that the implementation of the curriculum is securely embedded in all subjects. Where it is less effective, the activities teachers give to pupils do not develop a deep enough understanding of the subjects pupils are studying. Leaders need to develop staff's expertise in knowing how to adapt the work set to help pupils gain the depth of knowledge that they are capable of acquiring.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	140942
<b>DfE registration number</b>	908/6003
<b>Local authority</b>	Cornwall
<b>Inspection number</b>	10212953
<b>Type of school</b>	Other independent special school
<b>School category</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	68
<b>Number of part-time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
<b>Headteacher</b>	Dan Stockton
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£39,521 to £102,330
<b>Telephone number</b>	01872 264 2221
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.oaktreeschoolcornwall.co.uk">www.oaktreeschoolcornwall.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:oaktreeschool@oaktreeschoolcornwall.co.uk">oaktreeschool@oaktreeschoolcornwall.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	21 to 23 March 2018

## Information about this school

- Oak Tree School is one of several independent schools operated by the proprietor, Acorn Care and Education Ltd.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has increased its registered number of pupils on roll from 45 to 65.
- All pupils who attend the school have an education, health and care plan.
- The school caters for pupils with a range of SEND. These include social, emotional and mental health needs, specific and moderate learning difficulties, speech, language and communication needs, and autism spectrum disorder.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- Some pupils attend off-site activities, such as swimming and surfing.
- The school has exceeded the maximum number of pupils on roll it is registered to admit. However, as most Year 11 pupils have left, the school does not operate with more than 65 pupils at any one time.

## 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 had received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders, and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher, other senior leaders and some heads of faculty to discuss aspects of the school. The lead inspector met with the regional director, who is also the chair of the governing body, and a representative from Acorn Care and Education Ltd.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, science, PSHE education and physical education. Inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also spoke to staff about the curriculum in some other subjects, including art and design and mathematics.
- Inspectors reviewed the school's safeguarding documentation. They met with the school's designated safeguarding lead and scrutinised safeguarding checks carried out on staff working at the school and the single central record. Inspectors considered how well safeguarding leaders act on concerns about pupils' welfare

and safety. Inspectors talked to pupils and staff about the school's safeguarding practice.

- Inspectors checked compliance with the independent school standards.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and the responses to the pupil and staff surveys.
- The lead inspector also carried out a material change inspection in respect of the school's desire to increase its maximum number of pupils on roll from 65 to 105.

### **The school's proposed change to the maximum number of pupils**

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, inspectors checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162 (4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change related to the provision is implemented.**

To cater for more pupils, leaders intend to use additional premises. These are situated next to the existing school. The lead inspector toured the site with the headteacher. The new premises will provide more specialist classrooms, including a music suite, science laboratory and a gymnasium. The additional premises are suitable for the proposed increase in pupil numbers. The lead inspector discussed the plans for staff recruitment with the regional director and a representative from the proprietor body. School leaders have ensured that the independent school standards are likely to be met if the material change is implemented.

### **Inspection team**

Dale Burr, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Julie Carrington

Her Majesty's Inspector

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