

Inspection of The Cherwell School

Marston Ferry Road, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX2 7EE

Inspection dates: 19 and 20 October 2022

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Outstanding

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Sixth-form provision

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Ofsted has not previously inspected The Cherwell School under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. However, Ofsted previously judged The Cherwell School to be outstanding, before it opened as an academy.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils receive an excellent education, both academically and for their wider development. They experience a broad curriculum which is ambitious for all pupils across the school. The proportion of pupils studying English Baccalaureate subjects in Years 10 and 11 is above average and rising. Students choose from a wide range of courses in the successful, inclusive sixth form. Leaders' high expectations are built into this rich curriculum which is taught with great expertise. Pupils achieve extremely well.

Pupils enjoy a vibrant culture in school. Differences are respected and prized. Pupils work very hard in lessons and are hungry to learn and succeed. Leaders create this aspirational ethos carefully by placing each individual's needs at the heart of what they do. Relationships are highly positive, and pupils are safe from bullying. Discrimination is not tolerated. Staff tackle any issues very effectively.

The vast majority of parents recognise the school's high-quality work. Reflecting the views of many, one parent rightly commented: 'Cherwell provides a superb quality of education and experience for my child. It is a school where every individual can be themselves and diversity is celebrated while retaining a sense of togetherness and community. I cannot recommend this school highly enough.'

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

Leaders' thoughtful, ambitious approach means that pupils learn deeply and achieve highly from Year 7 through to Year 13. The curriculum in each subject is a cohesive journey during which pupils continually build on what they have previously learned. Subject leaders make sure that tasks designed to check pupils' progress through the curriculum have a substantial impact on pupils' learning. Teachers have expert subject knowledge which they pass on to pupils effectively. Staff support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) very well, including those in the specially resourced provisions for pupils with SEND, because they identify pupils' needs accurately and meet them precisely. Pupils who struggle with reading get effective help so that they are able to access the curriculum fully and become fluent, enthusiastic readers.

Pupils behave very respectfully. The atmosphere is calm and orderly. Pupils are highly committed to their education. They concentrate in lessons, debate ideas thoughtfully and socialise happily together at breaktimes. Leaders' high expectations for pupils' behaviour are underpinned by a wide range of effective processes, resulting in a motivational approach which rewards pupils' efforts and successes. Sixth-form students are role models for other pupils. Pupils' attendance overall is high, including in the sixth form.

Staff provide great care for pupils. Pastoral support is insightful and has a clear impact on pupils' well-being, in particular for disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils. It is a major focus in the sixth form, where students receive sensitive, tailored help

and guidance. Pupils also make an important contribution to others' well-being. Pupil 'ambassadors' are trained to help others with any issues they are experiencing. They promote a positive culture in the school which does not tolerate any form of bullying or harassment. Sixth-form students act as mentors for younger pupils. The sixth-form 'change makers' improve the environmental sustainability around the school.

Pupils develop a deep understanding of relevant contemporary issues which affect them as individuals and as members of society. The carefully designed 'social well-being curriculum' is taught effectively by a team of experts throughout the school. Additionally, different subjects contribute strongly to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils feel very safe about expressing their views. They are respectful and knowledgeable about different people's backgrounds and beliefs.

Leaders prioritise pupils' character development as a core aim of the school, helping pupils to make significantly positive contributions to the community. Although leaders are still re-establishing enrichment and extra-curricular activities after the COVID-19 pandemic, there is already a wide range in place. Leaders make sure that all disadvantaged pupils are able to benefit from these opportunities fully. Pupils get the help and guidance they need to achieve their high aspirations for their next steps beyond school. Careers education, independent advice and guidance supports pupils' choices very effectively. The vast majority of students go on to higher education when they leave the sixth form.

Staff are hugely committed to the school. Leaders, trust officers and trustees invest in high-quality training and development for staff, managing staff's workload and well-being effectively. Local governors and trustees have a very accurate view of the school, supported by the effective work of trust officers. They set an ambitious vision, challenging and supporting school leaders robustly to constantly improve.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make sure staff are knowledgeable, very well trained and suitable to work with young people. If staff spot any concerning signs, they refer these to leaders quickly, who then act with urgency and expertise. Leaders make sure pupils get the right support, including from relevant external agencies when appropriate. Pupils learn about keeping themselves safe, including online and in their relationships with others. When pupils have worries, they are able to raise these with adults swiftly. If any issues arise either in school or in the local community, leaders make sure these are addressed with the whole school immediately.

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.

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	137970
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10211899
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	2,004
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	693
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Kirsten Robinson
Headteacher	Chris Price
Website	www.cherwell.oxon.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school converted to become an academy in September 2012. Its predecessor school, also called The Cherwell School, was last inspected by Ofsted in 2008.
- In 2015, the school formed River Learning Trust, a multi-academy trust, with five other schools. The trust has grown over time since then.
- The school has two specially resourced provisions for pupils with SEND, one for pupils with hearing impairment and another for pupils who have autism spectrum disorder and speech, language and communication needs. All pupils in these provisions attend full time.
- The school currently uses three alternative provisions.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school 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 headteachers, the assistant headteachers and other leaders such as the special educational needs coordinator.
- The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer and the director of secondary education for River Learning Trust. He also met with the chair of the board of trustees and a group of local governors, including the chair of the local governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, music, languages and history. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with the subject leader, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at a sample of pupils' work.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour around the school and in lessons. Inspectors met with groups of pupils and spoke to a range of pupils in and outside of lessons. Inspectors also took into account pupils' responses to the Ofsted pupil survey.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors checked the single central record of recruitment checks, talked to leaders responsible for safeguarding and looked at the school's safeguarding records and documents. Inspectors also talked to a range of staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- A range of the school's documentation was scrutinised, including leaders' evaluations of the effectiveness of the school, information about pupils' behaviour and attendance and minutes of meetings of trustees and local governors.
- Inspectors met with members of staff to discuss the school's work and considered responses to the confidential Ofsted staff survey. They also looked at parents' responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View.

Inspection team

Matthew Haynes, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
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Andrew Foster	Ofsted Inspector
Ginny Rhodes	Ofsted Inspector

Zoe Enser

His Majesty's Inspector

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