

Inspection of The Orchard School

Metropolitan House, 3 Darkes Lane, Potters Bar, Hertfordshire, EN6 1AG

Inspection dates: 24 to 26 January 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

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

What is it like to attend this school?

For many pupils, Orchard School is their first successful experience of education. Pupils who attend the school have typically experienced significant disruption to their education. Pupils flourish because leaders have high expectations and respond well to their individual needs. Leaders carefully consider how to support pupils to manage their behaviour and re-engage with education. Consequently, incidents are quickly resolved, and bullying is rare.

Pupils feel safe. They know that staff are there to care for them. Strong relationships are at the heart of the school's work. Most pupils enjoy coming to school and attend well. Leaders expect pupils to give their best effort. Over time, pupils develop positive attitudes to learning. They try hard to meet leaders' ambitious expectations.

Leaders support pupils to identify their long-term goals. They enable pupils to gain the experience they need to access further learning and to be successful. Pupils enjoy finding out about different career pathways and make realistic plans for the next stage of their education. Those pupils who have spent longer at the school develop the self-belief that they can reach their goals. Pupils speak about their aims for the future with confidence.

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

Leaders design the curriculum for each pupil with consideration for their needs and interests. Pupils join the school throughout the year. For this reason, leaders implement a flexible approach which starts with the accurate identification of pupils' individual needs. Leaders think carefully about the most important knowledge pupils need to know. Teachers break learning down effectively into small steps to help pupils build their knowledge over time.

Leaders ensure that teachers are able to implement the intended curriculum well. Pupils access a broad range of subjects. Teachers have secure subject knowledge. They identify where pupils will revisit important learning. Consequently, pupils remember their learning over time. Teachers provide clear explanations that help pupils to deepen their understanding. Pupils talk with confidence about new knowledge they have gained. They enjoy learning.

Pupils often have significant gaps in their knowledge when they join the school. Teachers assess pupils effectively. Pupils have regular opportunities to demonstrate their new knowledge. They successfully complete qualifications before they leave the school. If pupils leave before this, leaders help them to continue their learning, or access training, in other settings and provide ongoing support.

Pupils develop a love of reading. Teachers choose books to share with pupils that enhance their understanding of the world around them. Leaders establish pupils' reading ability as soon as they join the school. Pupils receive intensive support to improve their reading. Leaders have recently trained some staff in their chosen

approach to phonics. This enables them to identify pupils' gaps in phonics knowledge. However, not all staff have received this training yet. As a result, the approach used by some staff to teach pupils to read is less effective and this slows pupils' progress.

A key aspect of leaders' work is to equip pupils with the skills they need to manage their emotions. The impact of this is evident. Classrooms are calm and productive most of the time. Pupils learn how to maintain and sustain an effective relationship with close support from teachers. Teachers know when to step back and let pupils make independent choices. This prepares them well for their next steps.

Leaders provide staff with the expertise, knowledge and skills they need to identify the needs of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They work with a range of other professionals to plan the provision for each pupil. Support is regularly reviewed to ensure that each pupil receives what they need to learn with success. Leaders celebrate the effort that each pupil puts into their learning. Pupils describe how this helps to build their confidence, self-esteem and positivity.

The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum supports pupils to learn about health and well-being. Leaders provide a range of real-life experiences to bring this alive for pupils. For example, pupils create recipes and cook healthy meals for others to enjoy. The policy for relationships and sex education follows government guidance. Pupils learn that successful relationships centre on trust. However, some of the offer for pupils' wider development is not as well thought out. For example, there are limited opportunities to identify and develop pupils' talents and interests.

Staff are proud to work at the school. They consider leaders to be approachable. Leaders help staff to manage their workload and support their well-being.

The proprietor understands their role well. They receive regular information about the quality of education. The proprietor holds leaders to account effectively. They check that the school meets all the independent school standards. Leaders have suitable plans in place to ensure that disabled pupils can access the school offer. This complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

All staff know and understand the procedures for keeping pupils safe. They know the signs to look for that may indicate something is not right. Systems for recording and reporting concerns are robust. Leaders check that records of concerns are accurate and reported in a timely manner. They work with external agencies to provide the right support for pupils.

The safeguarding policy is comprehensive and refers to the most recent government guidance. It is available from the school and is shared with all stakeholders.

All staff are familiar with the procedures in the whistle-blowing policy.

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

- The new approach to teaching early reading is in the early stages of development. Not all staff have received training yet. Some staff do not yet deliver early reading well enough. This slows pupils' progress. Leaders need to ensure that all staff have the phonics knowledge they need to support pupils to learn to read well.
- The offer for pupils' wider development is not as well thought out as it could be. There are limited opportunities to identify and develop pupils' talents and interests. Leaders need to further develop the offer they provide so that all parts of pupils' wider development are well supported.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	145293
DfE registration number	933/6008
Local authority	Somerset
Inspection number	10254684
Type of school	Other Independent Special School
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	6
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cambian Childcare Ltd
Chair	Christopher Strong
Headteacher	Melanie Bulmer
Annual fees (day pupils)	£49,246
Telephone number	01935 415903
Website	None
Email address	diana.coulston@cambianguroup.com
Dates of previous inspection	9 to 11 October 2018

Information about this school

- The school's previous standard inspection was on 9 to 11 October 2018.
- Leaders do not use any alternative provision.
- Pupils join and leave the school at non-standard points throughout the year.
- There are currently no pupils at the school who are aged over 16.
- The government's 'Get Information about Schools' website does not currently show the correct proprietor. Leaders shared evidence with the lead inspector about the process to rectify this.

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 that the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors spoke with the proprietor, their representative, the headteacher and other school leaders.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives into these subjects: English, mathematics, history and PSHE. In each subject, they met with the subject leader and teachers. They visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked with pupils about their learning. The lead inspector listened to pupils reading to a member of staff.
- Inspectors looked at the school's safeguarding policy and the day-to-day implementation of it. They talked with staff and pupils about safeguarding, pupils' personal development and behaviour. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.
- The lead inspector inspected the premises to check for compliance with the relevant independent school standards.
- There were no responses to Ofsted's staff, pupil or parent surveys.

Inspection team

Jane Dennis, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Stewart Gale

Ofsted Inspector

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