

Inspection of a good school: Oathall Community College

Appledore Gardens, Lindfield, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 2AQ

Inspection dates:

13 and 14 September 2023

Outcome

Oathall Community College continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Oathall is a large, happy school community. The school's ambitious values are reflected in pupils' positive behaviour. Everyone is expected to participate in the life of the school. Relationships between pupils and staff are strong. Bullying is very rare, but dealt with effectively if it happens. Pupils say that developing character is as important to them as their academic work.

The school prioritises pupils' safety. Staff and pupils believe that it is everyone's responsibility to help with this. There is sound advice and high-quality education to help pupils avoid risks and stay healthy. As a result, pupils feel safe.

The school offers a broad choice of appropriate academic qualifications. Staff help pupils choose the right path, encouraging them to aim high. Pupils are expected to work hard and most achieve well. Pupils who need extra help with their learning receive it, but this support is not always as consistently effective as it needs to be.

There is an exceptionally rich choice of extra-curricular clubs. Pupils from all backgrounds and abilities love volunteering on the school farm, in between doing their academic work. As one pupil explained, 'It's really good for your mental health.'

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

The school has a clear and ambitious vision for what pupils will learn. The principles that underpin this have been established with the support of committed staff and the very able governing body. Faculty leaders design subject content wisely to match these principles. They prepare pupils well for their next steps. Staff make sure that all pupils are on appropriate and ambitious courses. This includes pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Teachers are experts in their subjects. They spot misconceptions and give pupils precise feedback to improve their work. Appropriate training helps teachers share good practice

across departments. Teachers plan activities that are engaging and thought-provoking. For example, in English, they choose texts that they know will appeal to pupils from different backgrounds. In modern foreign languages, teachers cleverly use games and competitions to build pupils' confidence in speaking aloud. As a result, most pupils know more and remember more. They produce high-quality work and achieve well in public examinations.

The school tracks carefully how well pupils are learning. It collects useful information to identify where extra help might be needed. Following the disruption caused by COVID-19, it was identified that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with SEND were achieving less well. Specific strategies were implemented to help teachers provide the necessary help. However, these have not yet been embedded across all subject areas. Despite recent improvements, disadvantaged pupils and those with SEND still achieve less well than their peers.

Reading for pleasure is strongly encouraged. All pupils have a timetabled slot every day when they read the books they have chosen. The school checks pupils' reading skills. Well-trained staff work with those who need some help to catch up. Many of these pupils make swift progress as a result.

This is a happy school. Leaders champion staff's and pupil's well-being. Staff model the positive behaviours they want pupils to follow. Pupils respond well. They know that staff want them to do well and, consequently, there is very little disruption to lessons.

Character development is a real strength at Oathall. Pupils take on leadership responsibilities that build useful skills for the world of work. Careers advice is thorough and strong. Pupils debate important moral questions in and out of lessons. They organise votes on different issues and learn how democracy works.

Extra-curricular activities have a very high priority. Pupils really enjoy the wide range of opportunities. These include trips and visits, time on the school farm, sports, drama, games, music and many others. One parent described it as, 'A brilliant selection of creative clubs.' There is a high take-up by pupils. Leaders make sure that no pupils miss out, whatever their background.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Strategies to support all pupils' learning across all subjects are not yet fully embedded across the school. As a result, some pupils, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds or who have SEND, do not achieve as well as their peers. Leaders need to ensure that all teachers consistently employ strategies that will raise achievement for every pupil.

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 an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in October 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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	126085
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10287977
Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,241
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Rowena Chalk
Headteacher	Edward Rodriguez
Website	www.oathall.org
Date of previous inspection	15 March 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school uses five registered alternative providers and two unregistered alternative providers to support a small number of pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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 and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, other senior leaders and school governors. The lead inspector spoke with representatives of each of the alternative providers and with the local authority's link adviser.

- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, art, geography and modern foreign languages. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also visited lessons of some other subjects. They visited the school's daily 'reading time' and talked to some pupils in their reading catch-up lessons.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors visited some of the school's extra-curricular activities. They also observed pupils' behaviour before and after school and during breaktimes.
- Inspectors took note of responses to Ofsted's surveys for pupils, staff and parents, including reading all free text comments that were made.

Inspection team

Keith Pailthorpe, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Anne Cullum	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Fry	Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2023