

Inspection of Orsett Heath Academy

Long Lane, Grays, Essex RM16 2QH

Inspection dates: 17 and 18 October 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Good
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Outstanding
Previous inspection grade	Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The head of school is Sian Rawson. This school is part of South West Essex Community Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Stephen Munday, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Vivienne Northall. There is also an executive headteacher, Simon Bell, who is responsible for this school and one other.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils have a great 'can-do' attitude in this school. They meet adversity with a smile and show remarkable resilience. They learn outdoors for physical education (PE), whatever the weather. They travel to and fro, accompanied by staff, for some lessons at a neighbouring school. When they have had to move spaces to accommodate external events, they just get on with it. This is because they want to learn, do well and believe strongly in what they can do if they work as a team.

Pupils think highly of their teachers. They know teachers have high expectations and they rise to these. Many appreciate the time that teachers give. This may be providing extra tuition after school or sleeping in a tent on a weekend so pupils can complete their hiking expeditions. Pupils are proud of how they have helped to shape the new school, designing its badge and contributing their ideas on how it should run.

Partially due to its small size, pupils know each other well. They have strong bonds of friendship that stretch across year groups. As a result, there is a convivial atmosphere at the school. Pupils demonstrate good-natured behaviour. They politely wait, taking turns to go up and down the narrow stairwells.

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

The trust has shown dogged determination to give pupils a decent start to their secondary education. They have overcome significant barriers due to the unforeseen delays with the building of the new school. The trust has creatively used temporary accommodation at the local rugby club and specialist facilities at a neighbouring school. The sharing of staff between sites is enabling pupils to study for the full range of subjects that make up the English Baccalaureate. Leaders and staff's exceptional resilience and drive filters down through pupils and shows in their attitudes to learning.

The school employs a large senior team whose members lead key subjects and areas in the school. Along with staff, they have created a strong ethos of shared responsibility with pupils. Consequently, pupils are proud of their school and their achievements. Leaders think carefully about the experiences of pupils, such as how to provide role models for Year 10 pupils, who are the oldest in the school. This sharp attention to detail is helping build a firm foundation for the later growth of the school. Some big changes await. Leaders are aware of the need to remain reflective, diligent and flexible as the school expands in size, changes location and develops its curriculum further.

Pupils follow an ambitious curriculum. It focuses on helping pupils to understand the wider world and their place within it. For example, within English, the study of Russian and Chinese folklore helps pupils understand events they hear about on the news. Staff give pupils opportunities to practise scholarship. This may be through advanced articles or extra tuition. Teachers help pupils acquire specialist vocabulary

so they can access this. Pupils remember what they learn. Teachers ensure that pupils revisit areas of learning they are not so sure about.

The reading culture in the school is well established. Pupils enjoy reading and read often. The school provides several programmes to help pupils develop fluency and comprehension. Staff use assessment well to decide which programme will help pupils the most. Specialist staff teach phonics effectively. Pupils develop confidence with their reading quickly.

Staff read the latest research to help them understand how the teenage brain works. They regularly undertake training so that they can support the range of pupils' needs. Staff help pupils who may exhibit more complex behaviours to make the right choices. Lessons are calm as a result.

Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are catered for well. Staff use pupils' support plans effectively so they can access the same curriculum as their peers. Pupils with education, health and care plans who may find communication difficult feel safe in this environment to express themselves and ask questions in class. Pupils with SEND, like their peers, enjoy school and attend well.

There is emphasis on mental health within the wider development programme. Pupils undertake roles such as buddies and anti-bullying ambassadors. In their personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons, pupils learn about the risks in the local community. The careers programme is developing as pupils move through the school.

Staff are happy working at the school. They feel valued and appreciate the trust's comprehensive well-being charter.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Over time, the trust and school leaders have carefully considered the growth of the school and the impact of this. While, to date, they have made sensible and pragmatic decisions during this early stage of development, the trust and leaders should ensure that they continue to focus on the priorities for successful rapid growth. The school will change with a substantial increase in pupils and staff as they move into a new purpose-built school. Leaders should continue to consider, implement and review their plans so they maintain and build on the effective foundations they have successfully achieved.

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	147847
Local authority	Thurrock
Inspection number	10255008
Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	348
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Vivienne Northall
CEO of the trust	Stephen Munday
Headteacher	Simon Bell
Website	www.orsettheathacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The headteacher named is the executive headteacher. The school also has a head of school called Sian Rawson.
- The school opened on 1 September 2020 and is part of South West Community Education Trust.
- School accommodation is currently at the local rugby club. This is located adjacent to the site where the school is being built. Specialist facilities, such as those for the teaching of design technology, are used at the neighbouring secondary school, William Edwards School.
- Due to restrictions with accommodation, the Department for Education granted special dispensation for the school not to have an intake of Year 7 in 2023.
- The school currently has pupils from Years 8 to 10. As part of the agreement for opening, the current year group sizes are half the published admissions number (PAN) for the school: 120 pupils rather than 240.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

- 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

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

- 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 chief executive officer of the trust and a trustee.
- Inspectors met with the executive headteacher, head of school, senior leaders, subject leaders and staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, science, history and PE. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also considered the curriculum in other subjects, such as PSHE.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons, around school and at social times. They considered pupils' views about behaviour in the school. They also spoke with staff about pupils' behaviour, their workload and well-being.
- 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 considered responses to Ofsted's pupil survey and Ofsted's staff survey. They considered responses to the parent survey, Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.

Inspection team

Liz Smith, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Steve Woodley	His Majesty's Inspector
Andrew Robinson	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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