

# Inspection of Great Oaks School

Vermont Close, Off Winchester Road, Southampton, Hampshire SO16 7LT

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Inspection dates: 28 and 29 November 2023

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>
The quality of education	<b>Outstanding</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Outstanding</b>
Personal development	<b>Outstanding</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Outstanding</b>
Sixth-form provision	<b>Outstanding</b>
Previous inspection grade	Good

The headteacher of this school is Andy Evans and the head of school is Geraldine Lindsay. This school is part of The Specialist Schools Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Zoe Evans, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Tony Boyle.

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

Great Oaks is an exceptional school. It is an inspirational place where young people, at all stages of their school life, thrive, both socially and academically. The school is ambitious for every pupil, no matter what their starting points are. Determined staff do everything they can to ensure that pupils enjoy school and benefit from a carefully adapted curriculum.

Relationships between staff and pupils are very strong. Staff care for pupils with respect and understanding. This helps pupils to have a strong sense of belonging and feel part of the school community. These relationships, coupled with an exceptionally well-designed curriculum, ensure that pupils achieve highly from their starting points. As a result, pupils gain the skills and knowledge they need for a successful life beyond school.

Pupils' behaviour is remarkable. Where needed, well-trained staff provide expert support to pupils, helping them to regulate their emotions with dignity. Pupils demonstrate an exceptional understanding and appreciation of their peers' differences and commonalities. Bullying is understood and not tolerated. As a result, the school provides a safe and nurturing sanctuary for young people, from all walks of life, with a range of complex learning difficulties.

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

The school's curriculum is extremely effective. It is intelligently designed and organised into three different 'pathways' that reflect the different needs of pupils. Within each, the school has coherently mapped out the ambitious knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn, with clear emphasis on developing communication, literacy, numeracy and personal and social skills. This provides teachers with an adaptable framework, which they use very well to meet pupils' varied needs. This well-thought-out flexibility ensures that there is no limit to ambition and that every pupil is supported to achieve.

Teaching is adapted exceptionally well. The school identifies pupils' needs thoroughly, breaking down their education, health and care (EHC) plans into small steps. Teachers use these, alongside the curriculum, to plan coherent sequences of learning that meet pupils' different needs. The thoughtful design of the curriculum means pupils experience success and recognition. As they progress in their learning, pupils are encouraged and supported to obtain progressively ambitious and meaningful accreditations.

Teachers use their impressive knowledge to cater skilfully for pupils' diverse special educational needs and/or disabilities. New learning is modelled clearly and broken down in a way that pupils understand. Assessment is ongoing and used to adjust teaching and to fine-tune pupils' learning goals. This practice is routinely in place across the pathways and across the age range of pupils at the school. This makes

learning highly purposeful and ensures that pupils benefit from education that helps them to navigate the world around them.

Developing pupils' communication skills is a priority. Skilled staff use a range of highly effective communication strategies to enable pupils to learn. Teachers assess pupils' phonics knowledge accurately, swiftly putting in place any extra support needed. There is a noteworthy focus on reading, where pupils are supported expertly to overcome any barriers they have. As a result, pupils' communication skills improve significantly over time, and they develop a love of reading.

Pupils enjoy coming to school, and most attend well. For some pupils, their medical needs can adversely affect their attendance. However, the school analyses patterns of absence thoroughly and takes swift action to support pupils to attend as often as they can.

Opportunities for pupils' personal development are impressive. The 'Great Oaks Guarantee' promises a rich set of extra-curricular experiences to every pupil. Pupils enjoy the boundless inclusive opportunities to develop talents and interests. Leaders have given careful thought to the way personal, social, health and economic education and relationships and sex education and health education are woven through the curriculum at an appropriate level for pupils' different stages of development. As a result, pupils develop their understanding of important topics such as consent and privacy. Education about next steps, life in modern Britain, careers, and the world of work is interwoven into everything the school does. In the college, older pupils benefit from an intelligently curated programme of work experience, enterprise, citizenship, and independent living skills, which prepares them successfully for adulthood.

The school is exceptionally well led. Trustees and governors offer highly effective support and challenge to the school and have a secure understanding of their statutory responsibilities. Staff, governors, and trustees, at all levels, share commitment to the noble vision of providing high-quality education for all. They are humble, open and reflective, and despite the many strengths of the school, everyone is firmly committed to continuous improvement. The culture is collaborative, inclusive and devoid of hierarchy. Consequently, staff feel valued and are proud to work at Great Oaks.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	144205
<b>Local authority</b>	Southampton
<b>Inspection number</b>	10240625
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Academy special converter
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	339
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	34
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	Board of trustees
<b>Chair of trust</b>	Tony Boyle
<b>Chief executive officer</b>	Zoe Evans
<b>Headteacher</b>	Andy Evans
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.greatoaks.school">www.greatoaks.school</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	16 and 17 November 2021, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- Great Oaks School is part of Specialist Schools Trust Ltd. It is one of two special schools in the multi-academy trust.
- The school is a special school for pupils aged 11 to 19. Most pupils have complex learning difficulties. All pupils have an EHC plan.
- The school does not currently use any 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.
- Inspectors discussed any ongoing impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, trustees, governors, staff, pupils and spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- The inspection team carried out deep dives in these subjects: mathematics, communication, art and world studies. They discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, teachers, and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors considered 32 responses to the Ofsted Parent View questionnaire. They took account of the responses to the confidential staff survey, as well as the views of pupils that were gathered throughout the inspection.
- 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 met with the school's special educational needs and disabilities coordinator.

## Inspection team

James Stuart, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Louise Walker

His Majesty's Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

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