

# Oak Tree School

Truro Business Park, Threemilestone, Truro, Cornwall TR4 9NH

**Inspection date**

31 January 2024

**Overall outcome**

**The school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material changes relating to the school are implemented**

## Main inspection findings

### Part 1. Quality of education provided

#### *Paragraph 2*

- Oak Tree School specialises in delivering tailored provision for pupils with a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school has established a carefully designed curriculum that ensures pupils experience a broad and balanced offer that is adapted to meet their needs and individual starting points. Subject planning is sequenced carefully, across all subjects in the national curriculum. This sequenced planning has key knowledge identified from the beginning of key stage 1.
- As pupils get older, the curriculum increasingly looks to give them experiences of the world of work. This includes bespoke work experience through which pupils can follow their interests, talents and potential. Pathways into adulthood are an integral part of the curriculum. This means pupils access appropriate careers advice and support in developing their independence as they move into key stage 4. The school has appropriate plans to utilise its experience and connections should the material change be granted. The increasingly bespoke approach offered currently in key stage 4 can easily be replicated and built on should provision extend to key stage 5. Consequently, the design of the curriculum is easily adapted to meet younger and older pupils' needs should the material change be granted.
- Staff have appropriate experience of education, including in specialist settings. They use this experience, and the vision of leaders, to implement the clear and appropriate curriculum policy. The policy appears on the school website. It details clearly the bespoke approach taken by the school to meet individual needs within a broad and balanced subject-based curriculum. All policies relating to the curriculum reflect the aims and values that underpin leaders' vision. They also ensure that policy and practice look to promote fundamental British values.
- All pupils attending the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Curriculum planning and assessment are underpinned by these plans. Pupils' progress

is measured against the carefully sequenced curriculum planning and levels of pupils' engagement, and against the outcomes in their EHC plans.

- Personal, social and health education is an established part of the school's curriculum. It is one of the key pillars of the key stage 4 curriculum. As such, pupils benefit from learning opportunities that align well with the school's aims and visions. The expectations of the independent school standards are considered carefully. This includes relationships and sex education, tailored to the level of need of the pupils. Consequently, pupils benefit from a well-rounded education. Leaders' plans demonstrate that this will be the same for younger and older pupils should their application to take them be granted.

### *Paragraph 3*

- The implementation of the curriculum is effective. The school benefits from teachers with a range of experiences, specialisms and talents. Teachers share the same dedication to meet pupils' individual needs effectively. Teachers hold appropriate qualifications. They use well-conceived planning to deliver lessons, aimed to secure progress for pupils from their individual starting points across a range of subjects. Support staff are skilled, experienced and well trained. Collectively, this means provision is broad, balanced and appropriately adapted for each pupils' needs.
- The excellent relationships between staff and pupils recognised at the time of the last standard inspection remain a strength. Staff know pupils exceptionally well because they utilise these excellent relationships. Furthermore, their use of assessment is very well developed. Consequently, lessons are very well planned. Pupils are given the opportunities they need to take the next steps in their learning across a range of subjects.
- Some staff have expertise in early years and primary practice. There are others who have taught older students in key stage 4 and 5. This helps ensure that the school is well placed to take younger and older pupils should the material change be granted.

### *Paragraph 4*

- The school has developed a useful and wide-ranging system for assessing pupils' progress over time. When pupils arrive, the school ensures their academic abilities are baselined, that their individual needs are checked and any barriers for future learning have been identified. From this, tailored plans are developed and tracked. Parents are informed of progress against these plans on a regular basis. Leaders use this to inform the annual reviews of pupils' EHC plans.
- The school intends to use these established processes with younger and older pupils should the material change be granted.
- The standards in this part are likely to be met.

## Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

### *Paragraph 5*

- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effectively weaved through all parts of curriculum planning and the life of the school. Pupils benefit from daily routines and activities to promote social development, including assemblies and celebrations. This is enhanced by ambitious trips and visits into the local community and sometimes

abroad. Spiritual experiences are planned in science and in outdoor learning. Cultural differences are celebrated, including through the study and celebration of a range of faiths. The design of the curriculum and its successful implementation mean that pupils develop improved social skills rapidly once they start at the school. The school plans to extend the use of trips and visits for older students, if their application for a key stage 5 is successful.

- Opportunities to learn in the real world are a central element of the curriculum, particularly for older pupils. As such, pupils benefit from plentiful opportunities for self-exploration within the context of the curriculum and the world of work. They also benefit from opportunities to learn through their own interests and develop their talents.
- All elements of the current curriculum will be included in the design of the curriculum for younger and older pupils.
- The standard in this part is likely to be met.

### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

#### *Paragraphs 7*

- The school has pupils' safety and welfare as a top priority. Well-established procedures and a calm, purposeful atmosphere ensure that pupils can learn, play and relax safely. Staff are alert to pupils' needs and respond sensitively when extra help is needed. Pupils trust staff and recognise that they look after them well. They know who to talk to if they have a concern.
- The leadership of safeguarding in the school is strong and reflects the detailed and clear policy. Staff are clear about the expectations relating to safeguarding pupils and the specific contextual challenges for the pupils. The safeguarding policy meets statutory requirements and is published on the school's website. Collectively, the arrangements for safeguarding are well established and would cope well with the additional building, planned increase in pupils and change in age range.

#### *Paragraph 11–12*

- The school has developed and established a range of reliable health and safety policies and procedures. All members of staff play their role in helping to maintain site safety. They follow agreed procedures consistently and complete regular checks of the school site.
- The school buildings currently in use comply fully with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Fire signs, exits and extinguishers are clearly indicated and suitably located throughout the school's existing buildings.
- Fire doors have been installed in the proposed new classrooms, which are still under construction in a newly acquired building adjacent to the current school. Plans are in place to ensure that the remaining work is completed in line with statutory requirements, including the appropriate number of extinguishers, signage and smoke alarms.
- The proprietor ensures that the school's fire safety arrangements are checked regularly by appropriately qualified and experienced staff or specialists. Leaders make sure that any recommended actions are addressed swiftly.

#### *Paragraph 14*

- Pupil benefit from high proportions of staff that work with them in lessons and during non-structured times. The inspector noted high ratios of adults to pupils at breaktimes and lunchtimes and that pupils play in a safe and structured way. The school has clear plans for replicating the same levels of supervision should the material change be granted, including increasing the number of leaders, teachers and support staff when the new building is in use.

#### *Paragraph 16*

- The school's risk assessment policy provides a secure framework for staff to evaluate and mitigate potential hazards. Risk assessments are routinely completed as part of school life to ensure pupils' safety.
- The proprietor has ensured that the parts of this standard considered during this inspection are likely to be met if the material change is agreed.

### Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

*Paragraphs 18(2)–18(2)(e), 18(3)–9(2)(d)(ii), 19(3)–21(3)(b), 20(6)–20(6)(c), 21(1)–(4), 21(5)–21(6), 21(7)(a)–21(7)(b)*

- Safer recruitment processes are established. Leaders diligently ensure that all required pre-employment checks are carried out for all staff, volunteers and governors. These include statutory checks to ensure that staff are suitable to work with children. All staff appointments require at least two references. These checks are recorded appropriately on a single central record.
- Those in leadership positions, including governors, make regular checks on the completeness of the single central record. When necessary, recommendations are made to strengthen practice.
- The proprietor has ensured that this standard is likely to be met if the material change is agreed.

### Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

*Paragraph 23(1)(a)–23(2), 24(1)–24(3), 25, 26, 27(a)–27(b), 28(1)–28(2)(b), 29(1)–29(2), 31(a)–31(c)*

- The process of converting a commercial building, formerly used as a nursery, into new classrooms, food technology spaces, a meeting room, a sensory room, therapy spaces, an office space and other associated areas is well under way and almost completed. The building is well constructed and secure. It benefits from appropriate outside lighting.
- The school's plans for this building are well conceived, recognising that it would be readily appropriate for younger pupils already at the school, as well as any who may be referred should the material change be granted. The building has been refurbished to a very high standard. Current buildings are clean, well-kept and clutter free.
- The new classrooms have been thoughtfully designed with pupils' needs in mind. They are spacious, airy and bright. They will benefit from appropriate learning technology, lockable cupboards and plenty of outside light. Additional areas include individual toilets and an accessible shower, and specialist therapy rooms for pupils to receive

occupational, speech and language and play therapies. Acoustics and lighting are appropriate.

- Despite already having a medical room in other parts of the school, the redeveloped building has a new medical room which is suitably equipped with a sink and a nearby toilet.
- Suitable toilet and washing facilities are incorporated into the new building. There are three individual toilet cubicles on the ground floor and another on the first floor of the building. Each cubicle has its own sink, which has appropriately hot water for washing hands, but does not present a scalding risk. Accessible toilets and showers are also near completion for the benefit of pupils. Drinking water will be readily available using the new food technology classrooms and the kitchenette on the ground floor.
- The school's existing outdoor areas provide pupils with extensive areas to learn, socialise and relax. This includes there being a purpose-built, multi-use games area for physical education and outdoor learning spaces for the personal development curriculum. However, the school has sensible plans to adapt the newly acquired outdoor learning areas to be suitable for younger children and their likely associated needs. For example, there are advanced plans to install a specialist trampoline, a nest swing and climbing equipment. These will enhance younger pupils' play.
- Current pupils clearly enjoy using the school's current outdoor spaces for physical education lessons and at breaktimes. Pupils are carefully and appropriately supervised by adults. The school has clear plans to ensure that levels of supervision remain appropriate when the new building is in use and if they are able to admit more pupils. New fencing is being installed to replicate the high levels of security already in place at the school.
- The proprietor has ensured that this standard is likely to be met if the material change is agreed.

## Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

### *Paragraph 34*

- Leaders at all levels work effectively together. Effective governance and resolute self-evaluation underpin the success in establishing a shared vision to improve outcomes for vulnerable pupils with special educational needs. Leaders work closely with local authority commissioners to meet local need. As such, this has led to leaders' request to extend provision into key stage 1 and key stage 5, as well as to be able to take more pupils if needed.
- Leaders' actions and plans for improvement give appropriate consideration to the independent school standards. Leaders continually strive to find ways to improve how the school can effectively meet the needs of pupils. Leaders can already demonstrate the positive impact of the alternative approach to learning that they offer. For example, in considering their plans for the proposed material change, they have rightly developed learning spaces where the early years curriculum can be delivered effectively. This includes well-designed indoor and outdoor learning spaces.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The school is likely to meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that are relevant to the material change.

## School details

Unique reference number	140942
DfE registration number	908/6003
Inspection number	10320892

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's likely compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Proprietor	Acorn Care & Education Group
Chair	Richard Power
Headteacher	Daniel Stockton
Annual fees (day pupils)	£43,678 to £112,220
Telephone number	01872 264221
Website	<a href="https://oaktreeschoolcornwall.co.uk/">https://oaktreeschoolcornwall.co.uk/</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:oaktreeschool@acorncare.co.uk">oaktreeschool@acorncare.co.uk</a>
Date of previous standard inspection	13 to 18 July 2022

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	7 to 16	5 to 18	5 to 18
Number of pupils on the school roll	105	135	135

## Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	105	135
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	105	135
Of which, number of pupils with an education, health and care plan	105	135
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with an education, health and care plan	105	135

## Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	28	37
Number of part-time teaching staff	1	1
Number of staff in the welfare provision	15	19

## Information about this school

- Oak Tree school is one of several independent schools operated by the proprietor, Acorn Care and Education Ltd.
- Since the previous inspection, the school has increased its registered number of pupils from 75 to 105.
- All pupils who attend have an education, health and care plan.



- The school caters for pupils with a range of SEND. These include social, emotional and mental health needs, specific and moderate learning difficulties, speech, language and communication needs, and autism.
- The school does not use alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education to evaluate the school's application for a material change. The proprietor wishes to increase the maximum number of pupils on roll from 105 to 135 and extend the age range from seven to 16 to become five to 18.
- This was the school's third material change inspection.
- The inspector held discussions with the headteacher, the heads of school, the assistant headteacher with responsibility for the curriculum and the administration lead.
- The inspector had a tour of the school premises and visited a number of lessons. He reviewed the school's website, scrutinised curriculum planning and considered a range of school policies and procedures. He also reviewed plans for the development of the new building and how this will be used to implement changes to the curriculum.

## Inspection team

Matthew Barnes, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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