

Inspection of Oulton Academy

Pennington Lane, Oulton, Leeds, West Yorkshire LS26 8EX

Inspection dates: 6 and 7 and 26 March 2024

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

The quality of education

Outstanding

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The principal of this school is John Higgins. This school is part of Falcon Education Academies Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer (CEO), Angela Barry, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Nikki King.

What is it like to attend this school?

The school's mission is to ensure that pupils leave Oulton Academy as happy, well-qualified and confident young adults. The school provides a vibrant and positive place to learn that pupils enjoy.

The school has exceptionally high expectations for pupils. The relentless focus on oracy ensures that pupils have excellent communication skills. Pupils benefit from the ambitious curriculum the school has created. Pupils who attend the school achieve very well in public examinations.

Pupils welcome visitors to the school politely. They are keen to interact with others. They do so with kindness. The friendly and caring environment in the school means that pupils are happy and feel safe.

Pupils speak passionately about the wide array of enrichment opportunities available to them. The school ensures that there are no barriers in place for pupils to attend these. For example, the school gives pupils bus passes to ensure they can stay at the end of the day without worrying about how to get home. Many pupils take advantage of the exciting opportunities available.

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

The highly ambitious curriculum is expertly designed by leaders. There is careful consideration given to how the content of the curriculum progresses year on year. Leaders link with local primary schools to ensure pupils' starting points are known on entry to the school. This enables a seamless start to secondary schooling to be made in Year 7. Similarly, the school links with post-16 providers to ensure a smooth transition for pupils at the end of Year 11.

Pupils frequently revisit prior learning at the start of lessons. This helps them to remember important knowledge. They are highly proficient in recalling what they have previously learned. The consistently high-quality teaching means that pupils engage with their learning swiftly. Carefully considered learning opportunities ensure that pupils are enabled to think independently in every lesson. This dedicated time is known as the 'gold zone'. For example, in history, pupils evaluate various primary and secondary sources as they analyse subject content.

Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from the ambitious curriculum. The school identifies accurately the support that pupils with SEND need. The school shares this information with teachers, who ensure that pupils have no barriers to their learning. As a result, pupils with SEND achieve very well. The high-quality careers information, education, advice and guidance ensure that pupils, including pupils with SEND, progress successfully to their next stage of learning.

The school recognises that reading is central to pupils' success. Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils to read throughout the school day. For example, on World Book Day pupils read a book written by the school's creative writing group. Pupils who are at the early stages of reading benefit from bespoke support that enables them to catch up quickly with their peers. Pupils enjoy reading. They speak enthusiastically about the books they are reading.

The school is passionate about ensuring that pupils have access to exciting opportunities that extend beyond the formal academic curriculum. In life lessons, pupils learn about people's individual differences and world religions. They talk articulately about the protected characteristics, such as disability and race, and why it is important to understand and accept differences. Pupils model this understanding through the positive way that they interact with all members of the school community. Pupils value the leadership opportunities that the school provides. The school council, pupil leadership team, mental health ambassadors and anti-bullying ambassadors are examples of the roles of responsibility pupils hold. Pupils are proud to organise and lead activities that benefit the wider community. For example, pupils visit a local care home to read and play board games with the residents. They also organise a sports day for a local special school. Pupils embrace these leadership opportunities in a mature and proactive way.

The school has high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils rise to these expectations. They are polite and courteous. Lessons have very little disruption. As a result, there is a calm learning environment. When pupils struggle, the school takes considered steps to support them. For some pupils, this includes carefully planned adaptations to their timetable, such as attending an alternative provision. Leaders use these approaches thoughtfully to support pupils to overcome barriers.

The school is relentless in its support for pupils to achieve regular attendance. Nevertheless, some pupils do not attend school often enough. Too many are persistently absent. The school recognises that pupils' regular attendance is an area for continued focus. The school is leaving no stone unturned in its pursuit of excellence in this area.

Leaders are justifiably proud of the school's improvement journey. They are proud to serve the community. Leaders ensure that they secure the very best possible life chances for the pupils who attend this wonderful school. Those with responsibility for governance support and challenge the school well. This ensures that the school maintains its high standards. Staff feel supported in their workload and well-being. They are proud to work at the school and are united in the pursuit of excellence.

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

Unique reference number	148527
Local authority	Leeds
Inspection number	10297537
Type of school	Secondary Comprehensive
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	1,030
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Nikki King
CEO of the trust	Angela Barry
Principal	John Higgins
Website	www.oultonacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school uses four alternative provisions, one of which is unregistered.
- The school is part of the Falcon Education Academies Trust.
- 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 carried out deep dives in these subjects: design technology, English, history, mathematics 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.
- The lead inspector met with the members of the governing body, including the chair.
- The lead inspector spoke with the CEO of the trust.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of school documents, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans.
- 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 the views of parents through the responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments.
- Inspectors considered the views of pupils and staff through meetings held with them across the two days of the inspection.
- The inspection was deemed incomplete after the first two days. Two of His Majesty's Inspectors returned on 26 March 2024 to gather additional evidence. Additional evidence collection primarily focused on suspensions, exclusion and pupil movement.

Inspection team

Andrew Gibbins, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Mike Kilgannon	Ofsted Inspector
Jayne Gaunt	Ofsted Inspector
Mark Hassack	Ofsted Inspector
Stuart Voyce	His Majesty's Inspector
Thomas Wraith	His Majesty's Inspector
Chris Carr	His Majesty's Inspector

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