

Inspection of an outstanding school: The Old Park School

Thorns Road, Brierley Hill, West Midlands DY5 2JY

Inspection dates: 8 and 9 May 2024

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

The Old Park School is a nurturing place where pupils feel safe and happy. Pupils learn about a wide range of topics and subjects and enjoy coming to school. They benefit from resources such as the swimming pool and soft play to support their personal development. The school makes sure that pupils are involved in activities in their local community. For example, this year a group of pupils performed at a symphony hall to a large audience. This reflects the school's determination to see pupils succeed.

Pupils feel safe. Communication aids give pupils a voice to express their feelings and worries. In personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education pupils learn about online safety, keeping themselves safe and bullying. Pupils know what to do and who to tell if they have a concern. Pupils report that adults respond well to concerns.

In lessons, most pupils focus on their learning and behave well. Pupil relationships with staff are a joy to observe. For example, staff sing and dance with pupils. In lessons, pupils work hard to meet the high expectations that staff have of them. The school focuses well on improving pupils' communication skills, as well as enhancing their social and emotional development.

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

Since the last inspection, The Old Park School has been through a period of change. The interim headteacher and his new leadership team have quickly stabilised the school. Leaders have clear plans and ambitions for school improvement. Staff speak positively about the steps the school is taking to improve the school. They particularly

value the introduction of a working group to promote well-being. Parents also recognise the positive changes. However, leaders are aware that they do not yet have a full understanding of the school's work. This means they have not yet identified and begun to address all of the improvements that are needed to ensure that all pupils receive a high-quality provision.

The curriculum is well designed and supports pupils to become more independent. The school has carefully identified what they want pupils to know and remember and pupils learn about topics that motivate and interest them. There is effective planning in place for teachers to follow. However, some teachers do not teach the curriculum as well as they could. Leaders have spotted this but have not made sure that all staff have the training they need to deliver the school's ambitious curriculum as intended.

The school has prioritised making sure all pupils learn to read well. Reading activities are well planned. For example, adapted communication aids support pupils to learn the well-considered phonics curriculum. Now and next boards structure the order in which pupils learn their sounds. The selected texts are engaging and interesting for pupils. This means that pupils enjoy reading and learn to read well.

Pupils are taught to communicate well. They are able to express their emotions and ask for help if they need it. Most pupils use their communication aids well. The school has a carefully staged approach to build on pupils' functional language. For example, language displays become more advanced as pupils recognise more symbols. This makes sure that pupils are well prepared for adulthood.

The school assesses pupils' progress well. Every term, teachers identify where pupils are, and where they are heading next. Pupils in the sixth form achieve qualifications to support their next steps.

All pupils learn about the world of work. In the early years, pupils learn about people who help them in the school and wider community. In the sixth form pupils have opportunities to take part in work experience activities. This includes running a snack cafe, working for a catering company and a customer relations company. As a result of this, pupils are being well prepared for adulthood.

Attendance is well managed. The school quickly identifies reasons for absences and responds appropriately. As a result of this, most pupils are now attending school regularly.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The implementation of the curriculum is variable. This means that some pupils do not make the progress they should. Leaders should ensure that all staff are trained to deliver the curriculum effectively.
- Leaders do not yet have sufficient oversight of all of the school's work. This has meant that some areas are not well focused on the improvements that need to be made. The school should make sure that they identify and implement quality assurance processes that help them ensure that they can meet their ambitions for the school.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. 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 outstanding in November 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 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	103880
Local authority	Dudley
Inspection number	10322708
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	153
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	24
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Andrew Hegedus
Headteacher	Bradley Jones (interim headteacher)
Website	www.oldpark.org
Date of previous inspection	21 November 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties and autism.
- 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 had 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 spoke with the headteacher and other senior leaders, other leaders, governors, two representatives from the local authority and a representative from the local authority speech and language service.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in communication, mathematics and PSHE. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors discussed the school's approach to early reading and visited some phonics lessons.
- Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects and visited some lessons across the curriculum.
- 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 reviewed a range of school documentation relating to the work of the school.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders and staff about the wider work of the school.
- Inspectors took into account the views of parents, including reviewing the responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also reviewed the responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

David Lisowski, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Gwen Onyon

Ofsted Inspector

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