

Inspection of an outstanding school: Oakwood School

Druids Walk, Walsall Wood, Walsall, West Midlands WS9 9JS

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 June 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?

Relationships and care lie at the heart of this school. Leaders and staff are determined to overcome any barriers to ensure that their pupils lead happy and successful lives. They strive to make the school a place 'where every child shines'. As the result of all the school's work pupils' outcomes are improving further.

From the moment pupils start school staff work tirelessly with families to ensure the right support is in place for their child. One parent's views reflected others, saying 'I do not know what I would do without this school'.

Pupils are happy and content. Staff treat pupils with kindness and know each pupil extremely well. Pupils are very well supported. Consequently, they are often calm, settled and excited by learning. However, some of the school's agreed strategies to develop pupils' communication skills are not always consistently implemented by staff.

Pupils benefit from an array of opportunities which enhance their life experiences. These include judo, rebound therapy and visits from inspirational community members. Pupils are given many opportunities to take on jobs such as making deliveries around school. They have a real presence in the local area. These experiences empower a sense of responsibility and community engagement.

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

Since the last inspection there has been considerable changes to the school. The number of pupils has significantly increased, and secondary aged pupils now attend the school. As a result, the school has needed to expand on to a new site. All these changes have meant that more staff have been appointed. Furthermore, a new curriculum has been developed to ensure that pupils gain valuable skills for life such as communication, reading and

problem solving.

The school carefully considers specific provision needed for pupils and the environment in which they need to learn best. The school's curriculum pathway model means that the provision closely matches each pupil's needs. Carefully planned sequences of lessons overcome pupils' barriers to learning and help them learn well. The progress of all pupils is closely supervised to ensure that staff can act quickly when pupils need additional help or support. This enables pupils to thrive and succeed.

Staff know the pupils extremely well and know what support pupils need to get the most from school. Class staff work closely with occupational therapists, speech and language therapists and physiotherapists to develop a stronger understanding of the needs of pupils. The support for pupils with sensory integration needs is exceptionally strong. Low arousal environments and sensory diet programmes help them to self-regulate and feel calm and focused in classrooms.

The school pays serious attention to developing pupils' ability to communicate. Staff know that most pupils will need some form of support with how they communicate. Picture exchange systems, aided language displays and signing are commonly used. This helps pupils to engage in learning, find their voice and share their opinions. However, on some occasions, some staff do not consistently use the strategies that pupils need to communicate or provide opportunities for pupils to practice those skills. This slows their learning.

Reading has a very high profile in the school. Those pupils who are ready to learn phonics do so quickly. Staff teach phonics well and ensure pupils understand reading strategies and the stories they are read. For those pupils not yet ready to use phonics there is a carefully constructed process to develop attention and awareness of sounds.

The school is committed to making every moment count. This underpins the many exciting opportunities pupils are offered. Pupils visit shops, cafes and local venues to practise communicating with people outside of the school. This is helping to develop their understanding of life outside Oakwood. In addition, careers education prepares pupils well for their next steps. Pupils benefit well from a range of opportunities to work in the school office or with the school's premises manager.

Partnership with families is a priority. The school's family support team play a pivotal role in supporting parents through difficult times they might be facing or signposting to opportunities to enrich their child's life.

Leaders have taken staff with them on the journey as the school has grown. There have been many changes over a very short space of time. Staff have been well supported by leaders while the new curriculum and other developments have been implemented. Many staff are extremely appreciative of this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Some staff do not always consistently implement the school's communication systems well enough for all pupils to access the curriculum. While a broad and robust offer exists for developing staff knowledge and skill in this area, some staff do not ensure that pupils are supported with spoken language, symbols or signing. This slows progress for some pupils. The school needs to ensure that all staff act on the training provided to adapt the curriculum and provision to meet the children's receptive, processing, and expressive skills and provide pupils with consistent opportunities to apply and practise these.

Background

When we have judged 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 March 2014.

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	104275
Local authority	Walsall
Inspection number	10322731
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	3 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	207
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Paul Labrum
Executive Headteacher	Kate Bargh
Website	www.oakwood.walsall.sch.uk
Date(s) of previous inspection	2 October 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school is part of the North Star Federation. This is a hard federation with Rushall Primary school. The governing body is responsible for both schools.
- All pupils have an EHC plan. These plans cover a broad range of SEND, including physical disabilities, autism, severe learning difficulties and other complex needs. Pupils also have additional needs, such as sensory and medical needs.
- There were no nursery-age pupils on roll during this inspection.
- Since the last inspection, the number of pupils on roll has greatly increased. Many staff are relatively new to the school, including some senior leaders.
- The school has expanded to include provision in Pelsall Lane, Rushall.
- The school does not use any alternative providers.

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 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.

- The inspectors met with the executive headteacher, heads of school and assistant headteachers. The lead inspector met with eight members of the governing board, including the chair of the board.
- The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. He also held a telephone conversation with the school's own school improvement adviser.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in early reading, communication and problem solving. 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 inspectors also looked at sensory integration.
- The lead inspector observed pupils reading to a familiar adult.
- The inspectors spoke with members of staff about their workload and well-being. Inspectors also looked at responses to Ofsted's online staff survey.
- The inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around school.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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 the online questionnaire for parents, Ofsted Parent View. An inspector spoke with parents, transport escorts and drivers at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documents provided by the school, including the school's self-evaluation, school policies, curriculum documents and SEND records.

Inspection team

Barry Yeadsley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Chris Pollitt

His Majesty's Inspector

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