

Inspection of a good school: Oak Grove College

The Boulevard, Worthing, West Sussex BN13 1JX

Inspection dates:

11 to 12 June 2024

Outcome

Oak Grove College continues to be a good school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils who communicate verbally have highly positive views of Oak Grove College. One pupil told inspectors, 'This school values everything and everyone for their opinions and who they are. I love that about this school.' Pupils who do not communicate verbally frequently express their pleasure and engagement with the enriching learning that the school provides.

The school is determined that every pupil learns to communicate effectively so that they can express their views and make decisions about their own lives. Some pupils, for example, might be learning to use facial expressions or eye gaze to communicate that they want to continue with an activity or experience they enjoy, or to say that they want to stop. The school ensures all staff are highly responsive to pupils' communications, so that all pupils learn they can make decisions for themselves, and that their views and feelings matter. Pupils across the school achieve well because staff plan for each individual very carefully, and pupils are keen to learn and be successful.

Pupils behave exceptionally well. Over time, all pupils, including those with very complex needs in relation to their behaviour, learn to self-regulate and better understand their own needs. Pupils are kind and inclusive of all. They have high levels of confidence in school staff to be able to resolve any friendship issues. The school is very successful at reintegrating pupils who have previously withdrawn from or been excluded from education. Pupils attend well, and the school sensitively supports pupils and their families when pupils are unable to attend because they are not well enough.

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

The school has developed comprehensively sequenced learning pathways for all pupils. To ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of all learners, leaders have developed four clear pathways.

Pupils with the most complex needs follow the 'Animus' pathway. Their curriculum is carefully underpinned by their education, health and care (EHC) plans. Teaching and therapeutic staff collaborate thoughtfully to ensure that each pupil has a curriculum that is highly appropriate and aligned with their next steps and needs. Pupils on the 'Koa' pathway follow a well-constructed life skills curriculum that has been carefully designed to be broad and enriching. Other pupils follow a subject-specific curriculum. The school has ensured that the curriculum is planned and delivered by subject specialists who have a real passion for their subject. Pupils benefit from clear teaching unpinned by carefully sequenced curriculums. This ensures that across subjects they learn, pupils achieve well.

In September 2022, the school implemented a new approach to the teaching of phonics to ensure that staff were able to fully support pupils who are developmentally ready, to learn to read. At present, however, the programme is not being taught consistently well across the school. This means that while some pupils have benefited from more effective reading teaching, not all pupils have. Not all pupils achieve their full potential in learning to read. Alongside the new phonics programme, the school has renewed its focus on reading for pleasure. Pupils in all pathways are regularly read to and enjoy the engaging ways in which staff share stories with them. Pupils who are able to read, but who do not read regularly, have been supported to discover and develop their reading preferences. Many pupils are more confident in reading aloud now than they were previously.

Pupils in 'Animus' remain in the main school for sixth form, where their needs can best be met. Pupils from 'Koa' transition into the school's separate sixth-form building, where their curriculum continues to focus on life skills, with increased opportunities to practise these life skills in a range of contexts. Students in the sixth form particularly enjoy the meaningful opportunities they have to work in the school's café and to take leading roles in the school's annual plant sale, growing from seed, potting up and then selling a range of plants.

The school has developed a comprehensive and extensive programme for pupils' personal development, which underpins and supports the planned curriculum. The school ensures that all pupils are supported in their personal, social and health education (PSHE). For subject-specific learners, there is a comprehensive curriculum in place, which is carefully adapted to their needs. Other pupils follow a very personalised curriculum that aligns with their EHC plan, and their hopes and aspirations for the future. Subjects across the curriculum are enriched with a programme of experiences, visits and visitors. The arts curriculum, for example, is supported by a range of visits to theatres and galleries. All pupils participate in the school's annual production. For pupils who are unable to attend theatres externally due to their complex needs, the school ensures that theatre companies visit the school. Pupils across the school enjoy the 'signing choir', who gather weekly to practise and perform.

The school's careers programme is comprehensive and aligned with the needs of pupils and students in the sixth form. The school has built extensive links with local employers and specialist providers who support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities into employment. As part of this work, pupils spend one day each week at a local college, or they join enterprise projects that provide a supported transition into

employment. Students deeply value these opportunities and the way in which they prepare them for success in the future. As a result of the careful support and experiences the school provides, pupils' aspirations are raised, and they feel confident in their developing skill set and employability.

The school is highly effective in its engagement with staff. Staff feel very well supported in their roles. The carefully planned programme of professional development ensures that staff are expert in the needs of all pupils. The school engages with the wider community, including parents, consistently well to ensure the opportunities the school provides pupils with extend into their wider lives.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The teaching of early reading is not yet consistent or highly effective for all pupils. The school should continue their work to ensure that all teachers are expert in the teaching of early reading and know how to adapt learning to meet the needs and starting points of all pupils so that they achieve the best possible outcomes.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 good in January 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 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	126161
Local authority	West Sussex
Inspection number	10321914
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	273
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	26
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Ann Schreiner
Headteacher	Phillip Potter
Website	oakgrovecollege.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	10 January 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The chair and vice-chair of governors were appointed in September 2023.
- All pupils on roll at Oak Grove College have an EHC plan. The school is a generic special school supporting a wide range of pupils with learning difficulties. Many pupils have a diagnosis of autism and/or speech, language and communication needs. A number of pupils have severe and complex needs, including profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- Since the last inspection, the designation of the school's sixth form has changed. It is no longer a generic sixth form for students with learning difficulties but is a designated sixth form for students with complex needs. This means that pupils following a subject specific curriculum at key stages 3 and 4 now need to transition to a different education provider for sixth form.

- 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.
- The school is not currently using any alternative provision.

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.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and the wider leadership team. The lead inspector met with representatives of the governing board, including the chair and vice-chair of governors, and spoke to a representative of the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and interaction into early reading, the arts and physical development into physical education. 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 school's early years and sixth form were considered within the deep dives. Inspectors discussed the curriculum for early years and the sixth form with leaders.
- Inspectors considered pupils' behaviour and attitudes throughout the inspection and discussed the school's analysis of pupils' behaviour and attendance with leaders.
- Inspectors considered personal development through all deep dives. They met with leaders to discuss the school's personal development programme, including the curriculum for PSHE and relationships education. Inspectors talked to pupils about PSHE and other aspects of the school's personal development programme.
- 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.

Inspection team

Alice Roberts, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Gavin Thomas

His Majesty's Inspector

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