

Inspection of Open Box Education Centre

St. John's Road, Epping, Essex CM16 5DN

Inspection dates: 8 to 10 October 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Outstanding**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive at this nurturing and caring school. Most arrive at school having previously had very negative experiences of education. Staff quickly get to know pupils and understand their specific special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), as well as their individual interests and aspirations. This helps staff to put in place a curriculum that enables pupils to quickly re-engage with education.

Building relationships founded on kindness underpins everything that happens here. Staff use these relationships to help pupils learn effective strategies to manage their feelings and emotions. This helps pupils to quickly develop the resilience they need to keep going when they find work tricky. Behaviour is exceptional throughout the school. It is also exceptional during off-site lessons. For example, pupils represent the school incredibly well in the community when visiting the allotment to harvest herbs to use in their cooking.

The rich and broad curriculum reignites pupils' existing talents and sparks new interests. Whether learning how to code in computing or visiting local sports facilities to learn fencing, pupils love the curriculum on offer. They work incredibly hard to reach the high expectations all staff have of them. Pupils strive to achieve the qualifications they need for their future.

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

The school has designed a curriculum that sets out clearly the knowledge pupils need to understand to achieve highly. Teachers have placed this knowledge into a coherent sequence. The rigorous induction process enables the school to identify the specific individual needs of pupils. Staff then skilfully adapt the curriculum to make it relevant. This helps pupils secure the knowledge they need for future lessons.

Teachers are well trained to teach the curriculum. They support each other by sharing their expertise so they develop their subject knowledge. Teachers present information clearly to pupils. They check how well pupils understand content through well considered use of assessment. These checks also identify how well pupils understand subject-specific vocabulary. Teachers are precise with their use of vocabulary. This helps pupils to develop their own understanding of language.

Key skills sessions help pupils to close the gaps in knowledge they arrive at school with. Anyone who finds reading hard gets the support they need to become more fluent. This helps pupils when they read across subjects. These sessions also secure important building blocks of knowledge in mathematics and writing. For example, pupils secure their understanding of times tables. They then apply this knowledge when in mathematics lessons.

Pupils also make improvements in their writing. However, there is not a clear approach to how teachers reinforce the important building blocks of writing taught in key skills sessions across subjects. Sometimes, pupils do not secure this

knowledge quickly enough. This can mean some pupils do not communicate their understanding or ideas when writing as well as they could.

Most pupils have previously had many historic periods of absence. The school provides bespoke and high-quality support to break down barriers to attendance. Where needed, leaders seek support from other agencies to further reduce the anxieties that prevent some pupils from attending school. The school is creative at adapting what they do to meet the needs of individuals. Consequently, pupils want to be at school. They want to learn. This means pupils attend school and lessons regularly and punctually.

The school has carefully designed the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum. Lessons teach pupils important knowledge to lead healthy lifestyles. For example, pupils learn how to conduct themselves online. Pupils receive age-appropriate relationships and sex education lessons. PSHE forms a central part of the whole day. It feeds into the wider personal development offer. Pupils benefit from the many enrichment activities the school provides them. Trips to various entertainment venues, golf or the local theatre provide pupils with new and exciting experiences. This enrichment links closely to the one-to-one career guidance pupils receive. Pupils have access to a range of further education providers. This all helps pupils to identify what qualifications they need to secure their preferred destinations.

The proprietor has established a governing body to support and hold leaders to account for the quality of provision. Governors have the knowledge and expertise to do this effectively. Careful monitoring of the curriculum and school site ensures leaders understand where to make improvements. This helps the proprietor ensure that the school consistently meets the independent school standards (the standards), including schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. Governors also check how well school leaders support staff with their workload and well-being. Staff are immensely proud to work at the school. They care passionately about helping pupils to be the best they can be. This support also impacts positively on pupils' families. Parents and carers are incredibly appreciative of the difference Open Box Education Centre makes to the lives of their children.

The school's safeguarding policy reflects the latest statutory guidance and is available on its website.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- There is not a consistent approach to how staff help pupils apply some of the important foundations of writing they learn during key skills sessions when writing in lessons. This can mean some pupils do not write as well as they might. The

school should ensure staff understand how to help pupils apply what they learn during these sessions. This is so pupils are better able to communicate their knowledge and ideas when writing.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	144818
DfE registration number	881/6069
Local authority	Essex
Inspection number	10321484
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	14 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	9
Proprietor	Open Box Education Centre Ltd
Chair	Timothy Dolan
Headteacher	Alison Dolan
Annual fees (day pupils)	£23,500 to £60,000
Telephone number	01992 577300
Website	www.openboxededucation.org.uk
Email address	admin@openboxededucation.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	6 to 8 July 2021

Information about this school

- Open Box Education Centre is registered to provide full-time education for up to 20 pupils aged 14 to 16 years.
- The proprietor body is Open Box Education Centre Ltd. In September 2024, the previous chair of the proprietor body resigned, and the school applied to the Department for Education (DfE) for a material change to alter the chair.
- There is a governing body responsible for monitoring the performance of the school.
- All pupils attending Open Box Education Centre have SEND. Most have a range of social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Many also have autism and/or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- Pupils are referred to the school by their local authority.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- 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.
- Ofsted conducted a standard inspection of the school in July 2021, and the school was judged to be good. The school met all of the standards at this inspection.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with members of the proprietor body, governors, the headteacher, the SEND manager, the school business manager, staff and a representative of a local authority that commission places at the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects; English, mathematics, science and PSHE. Inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons, reviewed evidence of work and spoke with pupils. Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about some other

subjects.

- 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.
- To check compliance with the standards, inspectors spoke to leaders, staff and pupils. Inspectors visited classrooms and toured the school site, reviewed pupil records, school policies and records relating to a range of aspects of the school such as behaviour and health and safety.
- Inspectors considered responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Ofsted Parent View. They also spoke with some parents over the telephone.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for school staff. Inspectors also met with staff and pupils throughout the inspection to gather their views.

Inspection team

Michael Williams, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Rob James

Ofsted Inspector

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