

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Oak Bank School

Sandy Lane, Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire LU7 3BE

Inspection dates:

22 and 23 October 2024

Outcome

Oak Bank School has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

The headteacher of this school is Philip Collier. This school is part of Oak Bank School, a single academy trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Philip Collier, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Michael Rowland.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are made to feel welcome from the outset. They are cared for by staff who are deeply committed to every pupil being safe, valued and successful. Pupils have had a very disrupted education prior to coming here. This school gives them a lifeline back into learning. Pupils like having their own trusted key worker. All staff know every pupil very well. This ensures pupils' social and emotional needs are universally understood and acted on. Pupils also benefit from a tailored and flexible curriculum. Consequently, most pupils achieve well from their starting points and meet their education, health and care plan (EHC plan) targets.

Pupils respect the school's expectations for their conduct. Staff use their expert knowledge well to support pupils to understand how to manage their thoughts and feelings safely. Pupils are motivated by daily enrichment targets and the much-coveted 'Level 2' reward. They know that any unwelcome behaviours are dealt with swiftly and fairly. Therefore, the school is a positive and orderly place.

All pupils work towards qualifications in core subjects. There is also a wide range of vocational opportunities offered both in school and externally. Pupils enjoy the educational and therapeutic benefits of helping on the school farm, cooking, and exercising in the school gym.

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

The school has continued to ensure that pupils follow a bespoke mix of academic and vocational pathways. Pupils leave with the required qualifications to access sixth form, college or employment. The school has expanded the range of external providers it works with. Therefore, the curriculum is precisely matched to the interests, talents and needs of the pupils, including the increasing number accessing sixth form.

In addition, the school has refined how well it meets pupils' social and emotional needs, linked to their EHC plans. Leaders have developed a robust system for linking pupils' special educational needs to specific and measurable targets. This is having a positive impact on pupils' readiness to learn, their resilience and their self-esteem.

Staff know all the essential information about every pupil so that academic and social and emotional targets are clear to anyone who supports these pupils. This is particularly effective for secondary-age pupils who move around lessons with different adults. This means that all necessary adaptations and adjustments to meet pupils' special educational needs are consistently in place from lesson to lesson. As a result, pupils transition between lessons calmly and settle into learning well.

Staff use regular checks on pupils to identify and fill gaps in learning, including in English and mathematics. The school ensures pupils who need to catch up have timely interventions. This works effectively. Pupils enjoy the range of texts they study.

Throughout the curriculum, staff use their subject knowledge well to ensure pupils meet the standards needed for their qualification assessments, including in sixth form. Pupils learn knowledge in small logical steps. They regularly recall prior learning and apply literacy and numeracy skills in other subjects. The school has been successful in supporting several pupils to be socially and emotionally ready to deepen their knowledge and understanding further. However, at times, some of the work set is not ambitious enough to meet what these pupils are now capable of attempting. This limits how highly some pupils achieve.

Pupils who attend school regularly access the full curriculum offer. Leaders are very aware, however, that there are several pupils whose attendance is low. The school is rigorous in its follow up of this. Staff work with care and sensitivity to find solutions to improve pupils' attendance. This is having a positive impact. However, for several pupils, absence is still too high. It prevents them from accessing all the learning and social opportunities available to them.

Pupils follow a well-considered personal development programme. This strengthens their learning resilience, improves their independence and helps them to self-regulate. They are prepared effectively for adulthood, for example, by staff helping them understand consent, diversity and financial management. Pupils are taught about self-care and hygiene. Pupils in the sixth form take on ambassador roles. Older pupils also gain experience of work through mentoring younger pupils and by running the school shop.

There are opportunities to develop work skills in plastering, construction, animal care and sports fitness.

Trustees ensure staff have the required training and resources to do their roles well. Staff are appreciative of this. Trustees check on how well school improvement priorities are met. They have recognised the need to expand the expertise of the board and are clear on their strategic function. They fulfil their statutory duties.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- There are instances where some pupils are completing work that is not routinely ambitious enough. This means they are not achieving as highly as they are capable of. The school needs to ensure that when pupils have social and emotional readiness there is an increased expectation as to what they can achieve academically. School leaders, including trustees, then need to check that this is happening.
- For some pupils, while their absence rates are reducing, they still remain too high. This limits the range of learning and social opportunities these pupils engage with, therefore limiting their potential. The school needs to continue its work to reduce absence even further so that these pupils access the full curriculum offer.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024 graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be outstanding for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in March 2019.

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	140286
Local authority	Central Bedfordshire
Inspection number	10345386
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	9 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	127
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	15
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Michael Rowland
CEO of the trust	Philip Collier
Headteacher	Philip Collier
Website	www.oakbank.beds.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	8 October 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- All pupils at this school have an EHC plan, primarily for social and emotional needs.
- Pupils attend the school from a range of local authorities.
- The school operates as a single-trust academy with a board of trustees and members.
- The school uses 13 alternative provisions for some of its educational and vocational 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.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.
- The lead inspector discussed the ongoing impact of the pandemic with the school and has taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher, deputy headteachers, assistant headteacher, senior teacher, special educational needs coordinator, teachers and support staff.
- The lead inspector met with four trustees, including the chair and the vice-chair of trustees.
- The lead inspector had a telephone meeting with the school's improvement partner.
- The inspectors focused inspection activity on the following groups of subjects: English and mathematics; and animal care, art and food technology. For each group of subjects, the inspectors met with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The inspectors also reviewed documentation provided by the school, including the school development plan, its self-evaluation document, a note of a visit from the local authority adviser, and trustee minutes and visit notes.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the lead inspector: 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' interest first.
- Inspectors spoke with several groups of pupils from all year groups and observed their behaviour in lessons and at lunchtime.
- The inspectors met with groups of staff and considered the opinions expressed through the staff survey.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents expressed through Ofsted Parent View and from talking to some parents on the telephone.

Inspection team

Sara Boyce, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Fiona Webb

Ofsted Inspector

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