

# Inspection of an outstanding school: The Oaks Secondary School

Rock Road, Spennymoor DL16 7DB

---

Inspection dates:

17 and 18 May 2023

## **Outcome**

The Oaks Secondary School continues to be an outstanding school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils flourish at Oaks Secondary School. Staff develop strong, caring relationships with pupils. Pupils rise to the high expectations that adults have for them. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. Many expressed their appreciation by making similar comments that praised the school and staff, such as, 'This school is amazing, teachers and support staff all understand my child and his individual needs.' Another read, 'As parents, we know our children are so well looked after and have a wonderful time at school.'

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary. They move around school calmly and with great respect. Inspectors saw consistently positive interaction between pupils in all areas of the school. Pupils understand that they are all individuals and support one another.

It was evident throughout the inspection that pupils' safety is of the highest priority to all of the adults in the school. Pupils feel safe in school. They trust the adults who work with them and feel that they can always go to an adult if they need support with a concern. Pupils are aware of the exceptionally high expectations for their behaviour and they meet these expectations. Pupils say that staff will deal with any poor behaviour promptly. Pupils say that bullying does not happen, but if it ever did, they are confident that staff would act very quickly to stop it.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The adults across school are highly skilled at adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of individual pupils.

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

The staff in school know their pupils extremely well. They are acutely aware that pupils have a wide range of specific needs. Some of these pupils need a highly specialised curriculum. Leaders have ensured that the school works closely with a range of other professionals. These include health professionals, therapists and specialist support workers. The work of these experienced staff is seamlessly woven into the school day.

The school's curriculum is highly ambitious for all pupils. Leaders have thought carefully about the important skills and knowledge they want pupils to learn. These are delivered in a way that helps pupils to build their knowledge and skills over time. Meaningful experiences are woven into the curriculum offer to support pupils' understanding further. Leaders have considered how these can be made more accessible to pupils who may have difficulties in accessing a mainstream curriculum. Leaders monitor how effectively the curriculum is being implemented. Adults know their pupils well and design lessons that are well matched to individual needs. In addition, pupils benefit from a range of wider opportunities. Students in the sixth form were keen to talk about their experiences on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Two pupils achieving the gold award are very excited to have been invited to the palace this year.

Adults help pupils to prepare for their next steps. Work experience and careers guidance are strong features of the school's offer. Pupils in Year 11 and students in the sixth form described the support that they have had as being 'great'. Pupils' next steps are well considered throughout their school journey and where necessary are managed by a group of multi-agency professionals.

The pastoral and support teams form an integral part of the school's exemplary well-being systems. Adults actively support pupils' well-being through a range of strategies, including mindfulness sessions, occupational therapy, active listening and pastoral one-to-one sessions. These teams work carefully to ensure that pupils are well supported and that all adults working with them are supporting the plan around the individual pupil.

Pupils benefit from an excellent and highly effective personal development offer. Pupils access enjoyable cultural curriculum and enrichment activities on Fridays. These activities include events such as cookery, yoga, tai chi and gardening. Pupils also take part in trips and visits outside school, as well as meeting carefully planned visitors who come into school to support pupils' learning opportunities and to widen their experiences.

Staff are overwhelmingly positive about the support they receive for their workload and well-being. Staff talked about a number of ways in which leaders have supported them to reduce the pressures of workload, such as time to share good practice, a reduction in unnecessary paperwork and an open-door policy where staff feel welcome to talk through any new ideas they have to develop the learning opportunities for pupils. Governors are very actively involved in the life of the school. They support the school well and provide effective challenge to leaders.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and staff have undertaken extensive training to ensure that they can identify and respond to any concerns over pupils' safety. The training and understanding around the particular vulnerabilities of the different groups of pupils they work with are impressive. Staff are vigilant and report concerns promptly. Leaders work with a wide range of external agencies to provide support for pupils and their families. Governors make regular visits to review the school's safeguarding procedures. The school makes robust checks to

ensure that adults are safe to work with pupils. Pupils learn about keeping themselves healthy and safe. Adults plan activities that help pupils to understand more about the dangers they could face as they become more independent.

## 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 April 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](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	134662
<b>Local authority</b>	Durham
<b>Inspection number</b>	10255922
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	351
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	41
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Clive Hubery
<b>Headteacher</b>	Andrea English
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.theoaksschool.co.uk">www.theoaksschool.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	27 February 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The pupils are grouped into pathways that reflect the level of their special educational needs. Pupils can move between the pathways on their journey through the school.
- The school uses one alternative education provider, working closely with it to ensure that the curriculum is carefully matched to the needs of each pupil.

## Information about this inspection

- The inspectors met with the executive headteacher, the head of school, the deputy headteachers and other senior leaders. The inspectors also met with a number of governors and the local authority link officer.
- The inspectors carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, history, and personal, social and health education, including relationships and sex education and health education. For each deep dive, the inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at

curriculum plans, visited lessons, spoke to teachers and pupils, and looked at samples of work.

- The inspectors visited pupils across the school, including students in the school's sixth form.
- The inspectors met with the school's designated safeguarding lead and the governor with responsibility for safeguarding to discuss their work. The inspectors reviewed a range of documents, including the school's single central record, which includes recruitment checks made on staff.
- The views of staff who had responded to Ofsted's staff survey were considered. The responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, were also taken into account. There were no responses to Ofsted's pupil survey, but inspectors spoke to pupils in school.

### **Inspection team**

Catherine Beard, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Tricia Stevens

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates:  
<http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2023