

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

Unique reference number	134662
Local authority	Durham
Inspection number	10255922
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	351
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	41
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Clive Hubery
Headteacher	Andrea English
Website	www.theoaksschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	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

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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