Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Oakleigh School & Acorn Assessment Centre

Oakleigh Road North, Whetstone, London N20 0DH

Inspection dates: 3 and 4 December 2024

Outcome

Oakleigh School & Acorn Assessment Centre has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at the previous inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Oakleigh School is a very special place. The school's vision is to provide an exceptional, nurturing environment for all pupils. It does this extremely well. Parents and carers cannot speak highly enough of the school. Pupils flourish here.

The high ambitions staff have for pupils mean no barrier is too high to climb. For example, if a communication aid does not work for a pupil, staff will try another. If a pupil cannot regulate their behaviour, staff will provide sessions such as sensory stimuli and music to help them be ready for learning. The warm, close relationships between staff and pupils mean that staff readily read moods, wants and needs. This high-quality support enables pupils to learn and behave exceedingly well.

Each morning, a skilled, patient staff team warmly welcomes pupils. When they arrive, pupils quickly settle into consistent, safe routines. Pupils know that what lies ahead is a carefully designed day that takes into account their unique character, as well as their communication and learning needs. Pupils love their time at Oakleigh School and want to be there.

The school offers substantial support to parents, including workshops, counselling groups and one-to-one sessions. These help parents feel supported and involved in their child's education and well-being.

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

Pupils are not ready for the national curriculum and follow personalised programmes. The

school has structured the curriculum into three pathways which are designed to incorporate pupils' education, health and care plan outcomes. When pupils first join the school, staff take a careful, thoughtful approach to deciding which of the three pathways pupils should follow. Staff check what pupils already know and can do. This helps them to make sure that the pathway is right. Crucially, staff build a very clear picture of what each pupil needs. This means that they design learning that is highly personalised and engages pupils extremely well.

The integrated use of therapies and expertise from the therapies team help pupils to learn well. Pupils' physical, medical and sensory needs are seamlessly incorporated into day-to-day learning.

Most pupils are non-verbal, but this does not stop them from communicating their wishes and desires or from interacting with their friends. Running through the curriculum is an emphasis on communication. The school effectively supports pupils' development through various communication systems. The use of communication aids both in and out of the classroom greatly enhances pupils' lives. Parents are supported to use these aids at home, reinforcing pupils' learning.

Pupils of all ages, including children in the early years and those with profound and multiple learning needs, relish listening to stories and joining in with songs and rhymes. Staff use signing and objects to help pupils understand and enjoy books. Some pupils are ready to start learning phonics. For these pupils, staff expertly adapt the phonics programme to help pupils become fluent and confident readers.

Pupils enjoy and benefit from social stories, which staff are skilled in designing and delivering. These help pupils to prepare for changes or new events, such as having a blood test or understanding puberty.

The school has high expectations for all, and staff prepare pupils to be visible and valued in their communities. By the time pupils leave school, they have undertaken an array of experiences that help them to function in the wider world. This includes taking part in a bowling trip and learning to travel on public transport.

Learning is rarely disrupted. Pupils who find managing their behaviour difficult receive suitable support. They learn to self-regulate and gain independence. As a result, there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere around school.

The school has worked diligently to ensure that pupils attend school well. It works with families and other agencies to support pupils to come to school when things are difficult. There is a deep understanding of the challenges that families face, so support is tailored to their needs.

Staff appreciate the consideration the school has for their workload and well-being. They are proud to work at the school and benefit from high-quality professional development.

Governors know the school very well. Some have a background in education, health or

social care. This helps the governing body secure a deep understanding of the school and challenge leaders robustly. Governors, leaders and staff recognise that every pupil has something unique to offer the world. The school provides pupils with an education of the highest quality to enable them to fulfil their potential.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding for overall effectiveness in April 2015.

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	101396
Local authority	Barnet
Inspection number	10345730
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	133
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Nikki Bennett
Headteacher	Clare Power
Website	www.oakleighschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	12 June 2019, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The school has pupils with a wide range of special educational needs and/or difficulties (SEND), including profound and multiple learning difficulties and severe learning difficulties. Some pupils have autism.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- The school has provision for two-year-olds.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 other leaders in the school. Inspectors spoke with members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and

looked at samples of pupils' work.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the 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.
- During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including in relation to safeguarding and SEND.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders and staff to understand how workload and well-being are considered in the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils. They also considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.

Inspection team

Francis Gonzalez, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Jamie Hallums	Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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