

Inspection of an outstanding school: Oak Lodge School

Heath View, East Finchley, London N2 0QY

Inspection dates:

18–19 September 2019

Outcome

Oak Lodge School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Every pupil is made to feel special in this school, no matter what their background. Pupils receive high-quality care and attention that are well matched to their needs. As a result, they thoroughly enjoy attending the school.

Pupils behave remarkably well throughout the school day. When the bell goes after break, they make their way straight to lessons without any reminders from staff. Pupils told us that this is normal. In lessons, pupils settle down to work quickly. Staff are very alert to pupils' feelings and emotions. They know exactly when to step in to provide extra care and attention so that learning can continue without interruption.

Bullying is rare. Pupils trust adults to sort out any problems should they occur. Staff care deeply about pupils. If any child is feeling anxious, staff are quick to provide the care they need to help them get back into the 'green zone'.

Leaders ensure that pupils leave the school ready for the next stage, be it education, work or training. All pupils move on in this way. They gain the skills and knowledge needed to become more independent and confident about themselves. Indeed, this is the main goal for all pupils shared by staff, governors, parents and carers.

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

Leaders and governors have created a climate in which pupils with high needs behave well and work hard. They have done this by looking carefully at the needs of every child when they join the school. Pupils join the school with high levels of need. The education provided is closely matched to what parents expect and pupils require. This is the secret of the school's remarkable success.

Staff have detailed knowledge about what makes pupils tick. They use this to plan exceptionally well for pupils' individual needs.

Leaders have reviewed and improved the plans for what pupils should learn in each

subject. The curriculum is very well designed. For instance, a range of option subjects are available in key stages 4 and 5 that appeal strongly to pupils' interests. Considerable thought and attention are given to the order in which things are taught. For example, in digital media, pupils learn about still and moving images before they learn about film making. The education pupils receive is of high quality.

Teachers understand that most pupils forget things quickly and find it hard to recall important ideas. They tackle this by repeating important information regularly and in different ways, then checking that pupils know it. As a result, pupils build up their knowledge and skills in small steps. This gives them the confidence to move on to the next stage. Over time, almost all pupils achieve their goals – in particular, those related to developing stronger communication skills.

Pupils make strong progress across the curriculum in all key stages. This includes the high proportion of disadvantaged pupils in the school. In mathematics, many pupils in key stage 4 have learned the skills and knowledge needed to buy a product from a local shop. This includes counting coins and notes, and working out how much change should be received. Pupils are strongly encouraged to persist and achieve their best, with the right level of support always in place. Entry-level and sometimes GCSE qualifications are achieved by pupils in key stages 4 and 5; for example in subjects such as mathematics, digital media, music, and hair and beauty. Pupils have learned how to make an advertisement and how to play an instrument using stave notation. They also take part in worthwhile work experience.

Pupils have a wide range of interesting experiences in and out of school. Carefully chosen frequent trips are an embedded feature of the school's curriculum. Opportunities to develop talk and use increasingly rich language are skilfully woven into learning activities. Where pupils struggle with speech, non-verbal communication is used extremely well to keep them involved. This markedly improves pupils' social and emotional skills, and prepares them well for adult life.

Staff morale is high; teachers feel well supported. Staff receive regular quality training to further improve their specialist knowledge and skills. Teachers told inspectors that leaders have begun to take important steps to reduce unnecessary workload. Staff appreciate this.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have developed a strong culture of safeguarding. Thorough systems are in place for the safe recruitment of staff and to record safeguarding concerns. Staff are well trained and are clear about the actions they must take if they have concerns about a child or a member of staff. Leaders follow up concerns tenaciously and will escalate them to the appropriate agencies where necessary. Leaders have strong knowledge of issues in the local community. They work well with external partners, such as the local police and local authority, to address them.

Background

When we have judged a special 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 a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the first section 8 inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Oak Lodge School, to be outstanding in December 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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	143865
Local authority	Barnet
Inspection number	10110412
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy converter
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	193
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	54
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of governing body	Siobhan Fairclough
Headteacher	Lynda Walker
Website	www.oaklodge.barnet.sch.uk/
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school converted to an academy in January 2017. Its last inspection as a maintained school was in December 2013, when its overall effectiveness was judged as outstanding.
- Currently, Oak Lodge is the only school in the Barnet Special Education Trust, a multi-academy trust. The local governing body has full responsibility for governance, and its work is overseen by the trust board. The school is also part of the Moon partnership, which is made up of all the special schools in Barnet.
- All the pupils have an education, health and care plan; the majority for autistic spectrum disorders, moderate learning difficulties or other complex needs, including medical conditions. There are more boys than girls.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is well above the national average.
- Pupils are taught in mixed-age classes based on their cognitive level in all key stages.

- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school has National Autistic Society (NAS) accreditation and the headteacher is a national leader of education.

Information about this inspection

- We met with the headteacher, senior and middle leaders, and two groups of teachers who teach a range of subjects. Discussions were also held with the chair of the trust board and a group of governors, including the chair of the governing body. We took the views of parents into account.
- We considered English, mathematics, and personal, social and health education (PSHE) in depth during this inspection. This included discussions with senior leaders, subject leaders and teachers, lesson visits and scrutiny of pupils' work.
- We held discussions with the designated leader for safeguarding, looked at some case studies, and scrutinised the school's safeguarding practice.
- We observed pupils' behaviour throughout the school day and spoke to staff about pupils' wider development.

Inspection team

Nasim Butt, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Karen Matthews

Ofsted Inspector

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