

Inspection of The Orchard School

Causeway Green Road, Oldbury, West Midlands B68 8LD

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 December 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Good

Early years provision

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Outstanding

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a time of significant change at The Orchard School. Caring relationships lie at the heart of this community. Safeguarding is now effective. Inspirational leaders and caring staff are driving improvements at pace. All are committed to making the remaining changes needed to ensure pupils get the most from their time at the school.

Staff work alongside parents well from the outset to get to know pupils' individual learning, physical, sensory and communication needs. They use this information carefully to remove barriers to learning and enable pupils to achieve. Leaders know that there remains some work to ensure that all pupils access the communication systems they need to make themselves heard.

Pupils behave well in class and around the school. Staff know the pupils well and give them the support they need when they find things difficult. Consequently, pupils are calm and work hard in lessons. Leaders and staff closely monitor how the pupils interact together so that any perceived cases of bullying can be dealt with quickly. This means that bullying is very rare.

Swimming, rock climbing and forest school are priorities for all pupils. School-based beach days, national celebrations and remembrance days teach pupils about the world they live in. All are committed to pupils becoming confident learners who will contribute to the world around them.

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

Since the last inspection, leaders, supported by strong and committed governors, have worked hard to address weaknesses in safeguarding at the school. This is now a community where pupils feel safe and are safe. Leaders clearly understand what the school does well and what is needed to improve it. They are committed to making those improvements swiftly.

Many pupils start at the school with their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) identified by pre-school services or previous schools. However, staff work hard to ensure this identification is accurate and fully reflects the areas pupils need help with. Educational psychologists, occupational therapists and other services help to plan the right support at the right time.

Since the last inspection, leaders have created new expectations for what pupils should learn in different subjects. The planned curriculum initially focuses on communication and physical development and, depending on pupils' needs, moves on or includes more formal subjects such as history and geography. However, in some subjects, plans are not clear enough so that all teachers know what should be taught and when. This means some pupils are not provided with more challenging

learning when needed. Consequently, the expectations of the pupils are not always high enough.

Leaders rightly prioritise developing pupils' communication skills. Speech and language therapists support staff in identifying what is needed for each pupil to give them the tools they need to communicate. However, although these strategies are implemented well in some classes, this is not always the case for pupils who need the most help communicating. While some pupils are encouraged to use systems such as picture exchange or aided language displays, others are not supported to use such systems.

Teachers work hard to ensure that pupils learn pre-reading skills, such as awareness of different sounds. Developing these phonological skills is well planned, and all staff are confident in implementing these opportunities. However, too few pupils move from these early pre-reading skills to learning phonics. This means that while the pupils enjoy listening to familiar adults reading to them, they are not developing the skills to decode texts for themselves.

When children start in the early years, staff work closely with parents. All staff clearly understand the needs and abilities of every child before they begin because they listen to parents and pre-school services. Garden parties and other planned events provide opportunities for children to familiarise themselves with the school before they start in the early years. However, like in other parts of the school, this knowledge is not always used well enough to plan learning for children, meaning that opportunities for children to make the most significant progress in the early years are not always maximised.

In a range of subjects, and particularly in subjects such as personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, there are clear plans for what skills pupils will need to be ready for life outside of school. Encouraging pupils to be independent is a top priority. Bullying awareness, 'odd socks days', charity fundraising and 'Christmas jumper days' are just some ways that enable pupils to understand and get involved in the world around them.

Due to the impact of the pandemic and a broad range of health needs, attendance is low for some pupils. However, this picture is changing quickly. Recently, doctors and consultants have been invited to hold clinics at the school, so fewer pupils need time away from school. In addition, when school attendance is not possible, staff visit the pupils to teach them at home, so not a moment of learning is wasted.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Since the last inspection, the school has dramatically improved safeguarding. Policies are much clearer and identify the specific safeguarding issues for children with profound and complex SEND. Training is regular for all staff, so all are clear about what to do if they are concerned about a pupil. Consequently, pupils get the support

they need to stay safe. When required, the pastoral team supports families at school and home.

As a result of leaders' and governors' swift action over the last two years, safeguarding is now developing into a vital strength of the school.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The implementation of the curriculum across the school is inconsistent. Some staff do not act swiftly enough to move pupils onto more rigorous and challenging learning across the curriculum when they are ready. For some pupils, the expectations of what they are capable of achieving are too low. Leaders need to ensure that all pupils are consistently given appropriately challenging opportunities to learn and develop a broader and stronger knowledge across all national curriculum areas.
- Communication systems for pupils with the most complex communication needs are not yet securely embedded across the school. Sometimes, staff do not demonstrate their training in ensuring pupils access and use the systems to get their 'voice' across. Leaders need to ensure that all pupils have access to and are consistently enabled, empowered and encouraged to use the most appropriate communication system for that pupil.
- Too many pupils who could become confident readers are not routinely taught the knowledge that will help them to develop the necessary reading skills. Staff do not have or consistently use their training to move pupils from phonological awareness of sounds in the environment to understanding and using phonemes to decode words. Leaders need to ensure that all staff are experts in teaching reading and that pupils are taught a systematic phonics programme as soon as they are ready for this, so that more pupils can become confident readers over time.

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	132232
Local authority	Sandwell
Inspection number	10262543
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	145
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Helen Grindulis
Executive Headteacher	Kate Hazelwood
Website	www.orchard.sandwell.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	29 September 2020, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- In January 2021, a new headteacher took up post at the school.
- The new headteacher is currently on maternity leave. In the interim, an executive headteacher took up post in February 2022 to cover. The school does not use any form of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspector(s) carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- During the inspection, inspectors completed deep dives in the following subjects: communication, reading, mathematics, PSHE and understanding the world. In these subjects, they visited lessons, looked at pupils' work, and talked with pupils and staff about how these subjects were taught. Inspectors also looked at other subjects in less detail to check how they were planned and taught.
- Inspectors asked pupils, staff, leaders and local academy board members about safeguarding arrangements. They scrutinised the employment checks on school

staff and looked at other school records. They also found out about health and safety procedures and routines.

- Inspectors observed informal times to evaluate safeguarding and pupils' behaviour.
- During the inspection, the inspectors had formal meetings with the headteacher, senior leaders, subject teachers, governors, teachers and pupils. They also talked informally with parents, carers, transport escorts, drivers, pupils and staff to gather general information about school life.

Inspection team

Chris Pollitt, lead inspector	His Majesty's Inspector
Anna Vrahimi	His Majesty's Inspector
Russell Hinton	Ofsted Inspector

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