

# Inspection of The Orchard School

Causeway Green Road, Oldbury, West Midlands B68 8LD

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Inspection dates:	15 and 16 July 2025
The quality of education	<b>Good</b>
Behaviour and attitudes	<b>Good</b>
Personal development	<b>Good</b>
Leadership and management	<b>Good</b>
Early years provision	<b>Good</b>
Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement

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

The Orchard School lives by its motto of 'Together we learn'. Staff make pupils feel valued and support them to achieve well. Pupils know that staff want the best for them, and they rise to meet these high aspirations. Many parents and carers describe the school as 'amazing', saying their children now accomplish things they once thought impossible. Staff achieve this by getting to know pupils deeply and giving them a genuine voice.

From the start of the school day, there are clear routines that help pupils to settle well. Songs and rhymes permeate the environment, such as the 'let's get ready to work and play' and 'time to finish' songs. This enables pupils to move seamlessly from activity to activity. The school rewards pupils for demonstrating 'awesome attitudes', being 'curious explorers' and 'magnificent movers'. Pupils say that they have many friends in school and that there is always an adult there to help them if needed.

The school's provision for pupils' personal development prepares them effectively for the future. This involves both visits outside of school as well as welcoming many visitors into school. For example, pupils enjoy regular visits from a local professional football club.

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

The school has worked tirelessly to address issues identified with the quality of education provided. The school's curriculum is now logically thought out and rooted in the early years. The curriculum has been well-thought-through to allow pupils to build their knowledge and skills over time. Staff regularly check pupils' learning to ensure they are making good progress and that any gaps are addressed quickly. However, recent changes to the curriculum to ensure that pupils regularly practise important learning in relation to their education, health and care (EHC) plans are at an earlier stage of development. As a result, some pupils do not secure this learning as quickly as they could.

Pupils enjoy learning the foundations for reading. The curriculum prepares pupils for phonics through sound recognition, rhymes and songs. Staff ensure that there are no barriers to pupils learning phonics. They use innovative techniques to ensure that, whenever possible, pupils who struggle with communicating verbally learn phonics and become fluent readers. Pupils develop a love of reading. They enjoy listening to a range of engaging texts across the curriculum. The new school library is well resourced and fully accessible to all pupils.

Developing pupils' communication skills is at the centre of all learning. There have been significant changes to the way pupils learn how to communicate. Every pupil has a 'communication profile', which ensures that staff know the best way to communicate with pupils and develop their communication skills. Before children start school in the Reception class, the school ensures that it has the information it needs so children can learn to communicate well. Staff receive training on a range of communication methods, such as the use of signing, pictures and technology. However, despite this, a small number of staff do not use these methods consistently. This means that on occasion some pupils do not build their communication skills as well as they could.

The school has high expectations for behaviour and attendance. Staff help pupils behave well by taking the time to understand the causes of any negative emotions. The school works effectively to monitor and reduce absences, involving external professionals when appropriate. This includes providing 'early help' for families with children who have severe health needs who struggle to attend school for medical reasons.

Pupils' personal development is well considered and takes into account their specific needs. Pupils learn how to become responsible citizens and develop an awareness of the challenges they may face in later life. Pupils learn how to be resilient and 'have a go'. They recognise each other's individual successes with pride. The school encourages parents to share their child's successes at home using an online system. Pupils take part in rock climbing and swimming. Pupils enjoy being part of the school's signing choir. Pupils develop an understanding of fundamental British values. For example, by voting for different team's colours at sports day. This thoughtful provision enables pupils to be well prepared for later life.

The school, alongside the governing body, has ensured that it puts the best interests of the pupils first. This has resulted in increased workload for staff during a time of challenge and change. The majority of staff appreciate that this has been necessary and will bring benefits in the long run to pupils. Leaders have supported staff well on this journey.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

## **What does the school need to do to improve?**

### **(Information for the school and appropriate authority)**

- The school has not supported staff in giving pupils opportunities to practise and secure the skills linked to the curriculum and EHC plans, so they can apply these knowledge and skills in different contexts and situations. Consequently, some pupils do not learn and remember the curriculum as well as they could. The school should provide support to staff so they make sure pupils are provided with opportunities to secure curriculum knowledge and skills effectively.
- The school has not ensured that staff implement its agreed communication systems consistently. Some staff do not ensure that pupils are supported with symbols, signing and technology. This slows progress for some pupils. The school should ensure that all staff act on the training provided, so pupils learn and practise their communication skills consistently well.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	132232
<b>Local authority</b>	Sandwell
<b>Inspection number</b>	10378246
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Maintained
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	161
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Helen Grindulis
<b>Headteacher</b>	Elizabeth Hopewell
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.orchard.sandwell.sch.uk">www.orchard.sandwell.sch.uk</a>
<b>Dates of previous inspection</b>	13 and 14 December 2022, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties.
- At the time of the inspection, there were no nursery-age children at the school.
- Since the previous inspection a new headteacher has taken up post.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005. During a graded inspection, we grade the school for each of our key judgements (quality of education; behaviour and attitudes; personal development; and leadership and management) and for any relevant provision judgement (early years and/or sixth form provision). Schools receiving a graded inspection from September 2024 will not be given an overall effectiveness grade.

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation about the quality of a school's education provision.

- The inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication, reading, physical development and understanding the world. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, 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.
- Inspectors reviewed school documentation.
- Inspectors met with representatives of governors, including the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils at social times and in formal meetings.
- Inspectors met with staff and took account of the online staff survey.
- The inspectors considered the responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors spoke to parents at the start of the school day.

## Inspection team

Barry Yeardsley, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Marie Thomas

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Ofsted Inspector

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