

Oakwood Learning Centre

Unique reference number (URN): 141954

Inspection report: 19 May 2026

Exceptional	
Strong standard	
Expected standard	
Needs attention	
Urgent improvement	

Safeguarding standards met

The safeguarding standards are met. This means that leaders and/or those responsible for governance and oversight fulfil their specific responsibilities and have established an open culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and concerns are actively identified, acted upon and managed. As a result, pupils are made safer and feel safe.

How we evaluate safeguarding

When we inspect schools for safeguarding, they can have the following outcomes:

- Met: The school has an open and positive culture of safeguarding. All legal requirements are met.
- Not met: The school has not created an open and positive culture of safeguarding. Not all legal requirements are met.
- Insufficient evidence: Inspectors were unable to gather sufficient evidence to judge whether safeguarding standards are met.

Exceptional ●

Attendance and behaviour

Exceptional ●

Leaders' determined efforts have led to exceptional rates of attendance among pupils. Staff and pupils share supportive relationships that promote trust and a sense of belonging. Some pupils who attend the school have been absent from education for much of their lives. Leaders understand how to secure high rates of attendance. There is a carefully coordinated approach between therapeutic and teaching staff. Engagement with external agencies and other stakeholders has ensured that leaders have an accurate understanding of pupils' individual barriers to attendance. The benefits of being part of this school community are well understood and result in absence being very rare. This includes for pupils new to the school.

Pupils conduct themselves in an incredibly positive manner. They respect staff and their peers. Increasingly, pupils regulate their behaviour very successfully. Progress in pupils' attitudes to their learning is remarkable. Some pupils who had previously been excluded from school on multiple occasions now thrive. Staff help pupils to regulate their emotions and communicate any worries. Staff address these swiftly. The school's ethos is built on a mutual understanding that everyone is here for a common reason. Pupils appreciate the lengths to which staff go to understand them. This personalised approach has a transformational impact on pupils' attitudes to school and their future ambitions.

Leadership and governance

Exceptional ●

Leaders understand the school, its staff and its pupils incredibly well. Leaders' actions have led to rapid, ongoing improvement over many years. Much of this change is transformational for pupils who attend the school. Leaders remain incredibly reflective. They know how to take the school to the next stage of its development. Leaders' improvement priorities are precise. These priorities are driven forward by the proprietor and those responsible for governance, who support and challenge leaders effectively. The proprietor ensures that leaders have the resources they require to make a genuine difference to pupils' lives.

Professional learning is well considered and provides staff with the knowledge and skills they need to be highly effective. When leaders check the impact of their work, they constantly revisit what is working well and what can be refined. Through this approach, continual school improvement has been achieved. Nothing is left to chance. Everything is deliberate. The focus on the experience and education of disadvantaged pupils is relentless.

Staff are proud to work at the school. There is a shared sense of purpose. Everyone constantly strives for the highest standards. Wellbeing is carefully managed to ensure the relatively small staff team can achieve the ambitious goals set out by leaders. The independent school standards are consistently well met, and the school is a welcoming, well-equipped and well-considered environment in which to teach and to learn. This environment responds and reacts to pupils' changing needs and interests. The school has the resources it requires to create an inspirational and impactful learning environment.

Pupils benefit from a vast array of enrichment opportunities. Many of these are shaped by pupil voice. As pupils lead new initiatives, this strongly enhances their feeling of self-worth and accomplishment. A wide, rich set of experiences is provided for each pupil. Sports, bushcraft, photography, robotics and outdoor adventurous activities are just some of the opportunities pupils benefit from. Targeted work to engage pupils in their education is highly successful.

Through a combination of high-quality academic and pastoral support, pupils are increasingly well prepared for adulthood. The deliberate activity choices of leaders build pupils' resilience, self-awareness and sense of community responsibility. Pupils' strength of character is reflected in their empathy and respect for individual differences. The school encourages pupils to live the fundamental British values, for example by the setting of rules in different activities or voting for the student council. Pupils value individual opinions. They know that not everyone gets a voice because they were once the ones who were left unheard.

The curriculum for personal, social and health education and relationships and sex education is very well structured. It covers both statutory and non-statutory elements so that pupils receive a broad and balanced education on important topics. Leaders use their detailed understanding of each pupil to adapt this curriculum so that it precisely meets each pupil's needs. Sensitive topics are covered in appropriate detail to ensure pupils understand the important messages they contain. Pupils are encouraged to be respectful and responsible citizens. Deliberate opportunities to visit places of worship, cultural importance and national significance are carefully planned.

The school's careers programme is focused on maximising each pupil's potential, and it is praiseworthy. Often, this offer adapts several times throughout a pupil's time at school. Pupils get multiple workplace experiences and access to bespoke, independent careers advice. This includes for the youngest pupils. Consequently, pupils become increasingly ambitious. Pupils know the wide variety of employment opportunities that are open to them.

Strong standard ●

Achievement

Strong standard ●

Pupils overcome significant gaps in knowledge and understanding. They make rapid progress from their starting points. Pupils begin by mastering the fundamentals of each subject. When they are ready, staff skilfully move pupils on to new learning, ensuring they have grasped each part of the curriculum so that it is secure. Pupils achieve increasingly positive outcomes. National test and examination results have improved over time. The number and breadth of qualifications pupils achieve has also increased. Some changes to the breadth of qualifications pupils study are more recent.

Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training. Pupils go on to ambitious destinations despite starting this school with many gaps in their education.

The significant, positive impact the school has had on pupils is evident. Pupils are confident to discuss their learning and secure an increasingly broad and relevant vocabulary. Pupils are reflective and respond well to feedback from staff.

Curriculum and teaching

Strong standard 

Leaders have created a curriculum that is precisely matched to pupils' needs. It takes account of gaps in knowledge and skills, which can be significant. Units of work are broken down into small steps so pupils can experience success at each stage of their learning. Leaders know precisely where the curriculum is working and what can be refined. Clear endpoints throughout the curriculum give staff direction as to what to teach and in what order. Pupils' individual needs inform changes to the curriculum and how it is taught. Misconceptions are not just addressed, they are predicted.

Staff regularly revisit previous topics so that knowledge becomes embedded over time. Gaps in pupils' foundational knowledge and skills are rapidly and effectively addressed. Interventions are informed by pupils' specific needs. The school identifies any significant barriers to pupils achieving well and accessing the curriculum, for example a lack of vocabulary and comprehension. A range of purposeful strategies are in place to help pupils overcome these. Some lesson adaptations could be more closely tailored to individual pupils. On occasion, a greater focus on vocabulary is required to ensure that lessons consistently build a deep, rich body of knowledge among all pupils.

Inclusion

Strong standard 

High-quality inclusive practice is embedded throughout the school. Thorough transition work and collaboration with professionals enable leaders to quickly identify pupils' barriers to learning. Collaboration with the head teacher of the virtual school and local authority creates strong networks around vulnerable pupils. Leaders monitor pupils' emerging needs closely and respond promptly. As the picture of each pupil emerges and becomes understood, it shapes everything else the school provides them with. In all of its choices connected to education, pastoral care, enrichment and careers advice, the school is fully child-centred. Staff are strongly focused on the needs of the individual. Decisions are consistently made in the best interests of pupils.

Through effective monitoring, pupils' needs are regularly reviewed and changes are made as appropriate. Plans that identify pupils' specific needs are precise. They contain useful strategies that help staff to shape the curriculum on an individual basis. The quality of adaptive teaching is something leaders recognise needs constant focus. The ability of staff to make the precise adaptations each pupil needs in every lesson is still being refined. However, staff training is highly effective in ensuring that staff have the skills and knowledge to achieve the intended outcomes. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities are very well supported at the school.

What it's like to be a pupil at this school

This school provides a voice, an education and a future to vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils who have experienced the most challenging start to their lives. The school is unashamedly led by its pupils. It is about what pupils need and what will help them to thrive. Leaders have created a highly inclusive school community in which pupils flourish, both academically and personally. Exceptionally strong relationships between pupils and staff underpin this work. Therapeutic support significantly enhances pupils' educational experience. The school operates like an extended family, one that is safe, nurturing and highly adaptable to pupils' changing needs and interests.

The education and pastoral care pupils experience at this school shape the rest of their lives. Many pupils join the school having struggled in almost every other educational setting they have attended. This school gives them a fresh start, every day if needed. Staff understand pupils' needs precisely and enable them to grow into successful young adults. High-quality relationships, built on trust and mutual respect, encourage exceptional levels of attendance. This, in turn, enables pupils to achieve highly and feel that they are valued.

The sense of belonging, of community and of shared purpose leads to pupils enjoying their learning. Pupils gain a sense of real achievement, often for the first time in their lives, whether that be success in lessons, on the sports field, in learning a new skill or in simply being able to have open and honest dialogue with adults they trust. This school makes that happen. Because the school has created a strong sense of community, bullying is incredibly rare and pupils are increasingly respectful and understanding of each other's differences. Older pupils are role models of success for younger ones. Enrichment activities provide opportunities to strengthen peer relationships and enable pupils to experience success in new ways. Staff are incredibly proud of what pupils achieve every day.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that their transformational work to enhance pupils' attitudes to education, personal development opportunities and life chances is sustained over time so that exceptional standards are achieved in all areas of their work.

About this inspection

Inspectors carried out this standard inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, and checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Following our renewed inspection framework, all inspections are now led by His Majesty's Inspectors (HMIs) or by Ofsted Inspectors (OIs) who have previously served as HMIs.

Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, the designated safeguarding lead and other senior leaders at the school. One inspector met with the special educational needs coordinator. The lead inspector met with representatives of the proprietary body and those responsible for governance during the inspection.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The school predominantly caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs as well as those with autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

The school uses no alternative provision.

The name of the proprietor is Witherslack Holdings PLC.

The fees currently charged are £111,916.

The email address of the school is alister.sidgwick@witherslackgroup.co.uk.

Headteacher : Alister Sidgwick

Independent school standards

Independent school standards are either met or not met for each category.

1. Quality of education provided

Standards met

All standards have been met.

2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Standards met

All standards have been met.

4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Standards met

All standards have been met.

5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

6. Provision of information

Standards met

All standards have been met.

7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Standards met

All standards have been met.

8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Standards met

All standards have been met.

Lead inspector:

John Linkins, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

David Penny, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

This data was available to the inspector at the time of the inspection.



This data is from 19 May 2026

Total pupils

15

School capacity

15

Pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan

11

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

4

Our grades explained

Exceptional

Practice is exceptional: of the highest standard nationally. Other schools can learn from it.

Strong standard

The school reaches a strong standard. Leaders are working above the standard expected of them.

Expected standard

The school is fulfilling the expected standard of education and/or care. This means they are following the standard set out in statutory and non-statutory legislation and the professional standards expected of them.

Needs attention

The expected standards are not met but leaders are likely able to make the necessary improvements.

Urgent improvement

The school needs to make urgent improvements to provide the expected standard of education and/or care.

Insufficient evidence

Inspectors were unable to gather reliable enough evidence to grade an evaluation area. This is rare and normally only happens if there are no pupils on roll at the school.

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