

Inspection of a good school: EOTAS Swindon

Ferndale Road, Ferndale, Swindon SN2 1HL

Inspection dates:

12 and 13 September 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Most pupils who attend EOTAS have had difficult and negative school experiences in the past. Some have complex medical or mental health conditions. Staff quickly establish warm and nurturing relationships with pupils. This helps them find out what works best for each individual. As a result, pupils feel valued. They trust staff to help them re-engage with learning positively.

Staff want pupils to do well. Under the new leadership, the expectations of pupils are now much higher than previously. The curriculum is improving. However, the school recognises that certain subjects are further developed than others. Therefore, pupils do not gain a secure body of knowledge in all subjects.

Some pupils present with challenging behaviour. Staff encourage positive attitudes through a 'manners matter' approach. Most pupils rise to meet these high expectations. Staff support pupils who need help to regulate their behaviour in a calm and effective way.

Experiences beyond the classroom build pupils' confidence and resilience. For many pupils, 'enrichment Friday' is a welcome addition to their week. Pupils can knit, cook or walk along the Ridgeway. They learn to be positive advocates for their school by serving food to older residents and taking part in community art projects.

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

The school has been through a challenging time since the previous inspection. Following a period of instability in leadership and governance, the school's effectiveness declined. However, the school is back on track and on an upward trajectory. The headteacher leads with a determined vision. Staff speak highly of the raised ambition and expectation. They

value the training they receive to support pupils, some with significant and complex needs. Many staff describe the school as a 'special place' to work.

The school has made a positive start in tackling the shortcomings in the curriculum. In more established subjects, such as art and mathematics, staff have identified the most essential knowledge and skills for pupils to learn. Teachers generally know their subjects well. They revisit important knowledge and skills regularly to help pupils remember in the longer term. Pupils gain a range of GCSE qualifications and BTEC National Diplomas. However, where subjects are less well developed, pupils do not build up a rich body of knowledge over time.

All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school has effective systems to assess pupils' needs when they start at EOTAS. 'Pupil passports' set out how best to support pupils to overcome any barriers to learning. Nonetheless, learning is not adapted or broken down into manageable steps to suit the needs of some pupils. This slows the progress these pupils make through the curriculum.

The school has begun to make the teaching of reading a priority. Staff select interesting books to broaden pupils' views, interests and vocabulary. This inspires some pupils to read for pleasure. However, the school's assessment systems do not show where pupils need help with reading. As a result, those who struggle to read do not get the support they need to become successful readers.

Staff are positive role models. They reinforce what is expected and help pupils to regulate their behaviour so learning is not disrupted. Pupils usually behave better the longer they are in school.

The number of pupils who are persistently absent from school is too high. They miss vital learning. The school knows this. It has comprehensive systems to improve attendance. The school's work on this is beginning to have a positive impact.

Teachers adjust the school's personal development curriculum well to meet pupils' needs on each site. The content helps pupils understand different topics, including healthy eating, exploitation and radicalisation. Pupils experience meaningful encounters with the world of work. They attend career fairs and workshops related to apprenticeships. This helps pupils identify possible career choices.

Many parents praise the school's work. Positive comments include how the school has rebuilt their confidence in education and helped their children to see a future.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects, curriculum thinking does not clearly identify the essential knowledge and skills that pupils need to learn. This makes it difficult for pupils to build up a rich body of knowledge. The school must identify the important knowledge that pupils need to learn and revisit in all subjects as they progress through the curriculum.
- In some subjects, learning is not adapted precisely enough or broken down into manageable steps to suit the needs of pupils. This slows the progress pupils make through the curriculum. The school should make sure that teachers identify the small steps of knowledge in pupils' learning to help them secure knowledge over time.
- The school's assessment systems do not enable them to pinpoint the gaps in pupils' reading knowledge. As a result, pupils who struggle to read do not get the support they need. The school must identify the precise gaps in pupils' reading knowledge and put in place support to help pupils catch up quickly.
- Too many pupils are persistently absent from school. These pupils miss valuable learning. The school should continue determinedly with its work to raise pupils' attendance.

Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. 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 would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which 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 good in April 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 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	126171
Local authority	Swindon
Inspection number	10256795
Type of school	Pupil referral unit
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	125
Appropriate authority	The local authority
Headteacher	Juliette Baldwin
Website	www.eotas.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	26 September 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- There have been significant changes in leadership and governance since the previous inspection. The headteacher took up post in November 2022, following a period of interim leadership. An interim executive board has been in place since January 2022.
- The school caters for pupils who have been permanently excluded from a mainstream school or are in danger of being permanently excluded. It also provides education for pupils with complex medical and/or mental health needs.
- The school is organised over three sites: Fernbrook College, Riverside College, including medical provision, and Oakfield College. Each site provides individual packages of provision, ranging from short-term placements to long-term medical care.
- The school currently uses five unregistered alternative providers for pupils.
- Places at EOTAS are commissioned through the local authority and 'home' schools.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

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

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The 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, the head of each college site, the interim executive board chair and a local authority representative.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, art, and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with the school, visited a sample of lessons across the sites, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector listened to pupils read on the Riverside and Fernbrook sites.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the lead inspector met designated safeguarding leads, checked the single central record of adults working in the school, took account of the views of 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. An inspector visited an alternative provider setting.
- The lead inspector spoke with, by telephone, a school leader from a pupil's home school.
- Inspectors observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school sites. They spoke with pupils and staff about behaviour.
- Inspectors spoke with a range of staff to discuss how the school supports their workload and well-being.
- An inspector spoke to parents from the Fernbrook site at the start of the school day.
- Inspectors considered responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including free-text comments. They also considered responses to Ofsted's staff and pupil questionnaires.

Inspection team

Dale Burr, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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