

The Orchard School

Address: Cambridge Road, Canterbury, Kent, CT1 3QQ

Unique reference number (URN): 119058

Inspection report: 3 February 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.

Expected standard

Personal development and wellbeing

Expected standard 

The school ensures that the curriculum extends beyond the classroom. This helps pupils to prepare for life beyond school. Staff ensure that pupils develop appropriate attitudes to difference and diversity. This helps pupils to become increasingly confident in considering views that differ to their own. Pupils also enjoy a range of trips and visits that enhance their time in school, such as a ski trip to Italy. This helps pupils to develop their resilience and independence. Leaders ensure that all pupils benefit from the schools' offer. While they do not track this precisely, leaders are aware of those pupils who may have barriers to participation. They use this knowledge to support all pupils.

Leaders and staff understand the challenges that pupils face. This means staff help pupils to develop strategies to manage their feelings. For example, staff ensure that the school dog is available to pupils at key transition times. These strategies help most pupils to manage their own emotions appropriately.

Staff ensure pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and well informed. This is carefully matched to the needs of pupils. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe online. They also talk confidently about democracy in the context of their active school council. The school's approach to careers education is becoming increasingly effective. Leaders have clearly identified the key work skills that pupils need. They enhance this effectively with skilled careers guidance. The school is working carefully towards the Gatsby benchmarks. Leaders have ambitious plans to deepen the employer opportunities that pupils enjoy.

Pupils have ample opportunities to develop skills and talents. For example, pupils represent the school in a range of sports against local schools. Pupils also build leadership skills through a range of roles, such as class representative. Pupils are proud to represent the school.

Needs attention

Achievement

Needs attention 

Too many pupils do not achieve as well as they should. Some pupils learn the skills and knowledge they need. However, this is not typical. A significant minority of pupils do not build effectively on their learning. Many pupils arrive with significant gaps in their foundational knowledge. In some areas, such as reading, pupils typically develop the knowledge of sounds and letters they need to become confident readers. However, too many pupils do not improve their writing over time.

Pupils' readiness for their next steps varies. Older pupils achieve a wide range of qualifications. These typically include stage-appropriate qualifications in mathematics and English. This helps most pupils to transition successfully to post-16 provision. However, the

gaps in pupils' knowledge mean that pupils are not always able to access the curriculum as well as they could as they progress through the school.

Attendance and behaviour

Needs attention 

Attendance has declined over time. This means that too many pupils miss out on their education. However, this is partially linked to the changing context of the school. Leaders have used part-time timetables appropriately to re-engage those pupils who have the most complex needs. This has had an impact on school attendance. Leaders recognise the importance of attendance. They analyse this carefully. This helps them to identify trends or those pupils causing concern effectively. As a result, leaders have developed appropriate strategies to support pupils who need additional help. This work is effective and is beginning to help these pupils to attend more frequently.

Pupils' behaviour varies. Many classes are calm and orderly. However, staff do not always apply expectations for behaviour consistently enough. This means some incidents are not always challenged effectively. Breaktimes are similarly varied. While many pupils do behave well, a small number do not interact positively. This is not always managed consistently, and routines are not clearly understood by all.

Staff foster positive relationships with pupils. This helps pupils to learn. They generally listen carefully to teachers and try hard to complete their work. However, some pupils do not engage with learning well enough. Leaders quickly respond to serious incidents, such as discriminatory language. Staff work effectively with pupils to break down entrenched attitudes.

Curriculum and teaching

Needs attention 

Leaders have a broad understanding of the quality of teaching, but this knowledge lacks precision. As a result, leaders do not define priorities for improvement clearly enough. This means that practice is inconsistent. Some areas do not improve swiftly enough. The school has designed a balanced and ambitious curriculum. Staff clearly identify the skills and knowledge they want pupils to learn. Pupils generally work towards appropriate end points. In some subjects the curriculum is well designed and helps pupils to develop a range of skills and knowledge.

Leaders recognise that many pupils arrive with significant gaps in their basic knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics. Leaders have selected an appropriate scheme for the teaching of phonics. They have begun to embed this work effectively. While leaders recognise this essential knowledge is a priority, the work to support other aspects is not yet systematic. For example, how staff address pupils' accuracy of writing and spelling is not secure.

Pupils' experiences of the curriculum vary. The best teaching ensures that pupils have the knowledge they need. However, teachers do not always explain learning clearly. The checks that teachers make on learning are not precise enough. As a result, teachers do not always

know where pupils have gaps in knowledge. This means the activities they select do not always help pupils to build on prior learning.

Inclusion

Needs attention 

Leaders do not yet have a clear enough understanding of the impact of the support that pupils receive. Leaders know the pupils well. This helps them to identify pupils' needs accurately. This is beginning to help leaders break down pupils' complex barriers to learning. The school has introduced a range of support and interventions for pupils. This includes specific strategies to help pupils with complex communication needs. These approaches are well-embedded and support pupils well. However, teachers do not have a consistent enough understanding of pupils' individual learning targets. Staff have appropriate training to meet the needs of pupils, although this is not always reflected in practice in the classroom. This means that some pupils do not receive the support they need to achieve well. Leaders have begun to monitor the impact of this work, but this is in its relatively early stages.

The school has a clear strategy to use pupil premium funding effectively. This helps to break down the financial or social barriers that pupils may face. Leaders have appropriate oversight and track the impact of this accurately. They enhance this approach through close work with external agencies, such as social care. This means that pupils known to these services are well supported in school.

Leadership and governance

Needs attention 

The school has been through a period of significant upheaval. New leaders have stabilised the school and begun to overhaul school systems. This work is relatively new. Leaders recognise the priorities for improvement and have begun this work at pace. This has had an impact in some areas. However, leaders recognise the work is ongoing. Leaders' own self-evaluation of the school is generally accurate, although their understanding of the impact of their work is not always precise enough. This limits the ongoing impact of some of the strategies they have introduced.

Governors have supported leaders well to stabilise the school. They discuss priorities for improvement confidently. Governors ensure they have the knowledge of the school they need, for example through well-designed monitoring processes. This helps them to support leaders and to hold them to account in equal measure. They understand their statutory duties and carry them out effectively. Governors have clear oversight of the school's work to support disadvantaged pupils.

Leaders ensure that staff have appropriate professional learning. This aligns carefully with school improvement priorities. As a result, staff are becoming increasingly confident in applying the techniques they learn. On the whole, staff feel well prepared for their roles. Staff enjoy working at the school. They typically feel well supported by leaders and the help they receive from the staff team. Staff are committed to the pupils. They work hard to build positive relationships with them. Leaders, like the staff, have high ambitions for the pupils and ensure they work in their best interests.

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

The school works hard to re-engage pupils with learning. Pupils explain that they had previously struggled to manage their feelings. Staff at The Orchard School give them the support and care they need to regulate their emotions and be ready for learning. Pupils also benefit from the varied offer beyond the classroom, such as the wide range of sporting activities. This helps them to build their confidence and resilience.

Pupils build trusting relationships with staff. This helps them to feel happy and safe in school. This is evident in the warm greetings that staff give pupils at the start of the day. Staff know pupils well and quickly address concerns they may have. Pupils who require additional help to manage their emotions enjoy spending time with Hugo, the school dog. This helps them to calm and return to learning. Staff generally have high expectations for pupils' behaviour. This helps many pupils to behave well and to work hard in lessons. However, staff do not always apply these expectations consistently well. This means that some pupils do not always behave as well as they could. Breaktimes are positive times, and many pupils play together positively. However, the routines for transitions to lessons are not well embedded enough. This means that pupils sometimes struggle to return to their learning.

Many pupils enjoy learning. They work hard and learn the skills and knowledge they need. However, weaknesses in the curriculum and teaching mean that pupils do not learn the crucial knowledge they need as well as they should. All pupils have significant barriers to learning. In many lessons teachers adapt the activities to break these barriers down and help pupils to learn. However, in too many lessons, learning is not adapted well enough, and this means that some pupils do not engage with learning well. As a result, some pupils fall behind in their learning.

Next steps

- Leaders should ensure that assessments, including the checks that teachers make on learning, are effective and better inform teachers so they can enable pupils to know and remember more of the curriculum.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff understand pupils' barriers to learning, including gaps in foundational knowledge, so they can design effective adaptations that help all pupils to access learning and develop the skills and knowledge they need.
 - Leaders should ensure that staff apply the school's behavioural expectations consistently and work with staff to design effective routines to support pupils consistently and effectively.
 - Leaders should ensure they have a secure understanding of the impact of the work they have already begun so they can provide staff with a clear understanding of the school's improvement priorities and work effectively with leaders to embed new practices swiftly.
 - Leaders should ensure that they continue to build on the work they have begun to improve attendance so all pupils attend more frequently.
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About this inspection

The chair of the board of governors in this school is Aaron Janes.

Inspectors carried out this full inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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

The inspectors met with the headteacher and other leaders during the inspection. The lead inspector also met with a group of governors, including the chair. They also held a telephone conversation with a representative of the local authority. The inspection team also spoke to indicative groups of staff and pupils during the inspection.

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.

The inspectors confirmed the following information about the school:

The senior leadership team has changed since the last inspection.

The school makes use of 6 alternative provisions, including 6 that are unregistered.

Headteacher: Alistair Hammond

Lead inspector:

Gavin Thomas, His Majesty's Inspector

Team inspector:

Liz McIntosh, Ofsted Inspector

Facts and figures used on inspection

The data was used by the inspector(s) during the inspection. More recent data may have been published since the inspection took place.

 This data is from 3 February 2026

School and pupil context

Total pupils

110

What does this mean?

The total number of pupils currently at this school and how this compares to other schools of this phase in England.

Pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM)

77.27%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals at any point in the last six years.

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

100.00%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with an education, health and care plan. This covers pupils with more support than is available through special educational needs support.

Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) support

0.00%

What does this mean?

The proportion of pupils with reported special educational support needs at the school.

Location deprivation

Above average

What does this mean?

Based on the English Indices of Deprivation (2019) and the school's location, we have calculated whether the school is located in a more or less deprived area.

Resourced Provision or SEND Unit (if applicable)

No resourced provision

What does this mean?

Whether school has Resourced Provision or SEND unit (if applicable).

Type of specialist provision (if applicable)

SLCN - Speech, language and Communication, ASD - Autistic Spectrum Disorder, SEMH - Social, Emotional and Mental Health

What does this mean?

The type of Special Educational Needs provision provided at the school (if applicable).

Destinations after 16

Destinations after 16

Percentage of pupils staying in education or employment for at least 2 terms after the end of secondary school (key stage 4).

Year	This school
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2023 leavers (provisional)	69%
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2022 leavers (revised)	79%
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2021 leavers (revised)	79%
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Absence

Overall absence

The percentage of all possible mornings and afternoons missed due to absence from school (for whatever reason, whether authorised or unauthorised) across all pupils.

Year	This school
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2024/25 (2 term)	25.2%
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2023/24 (3 term)	18.9%
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2022/23 (3 term)	14.3%
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Persistent absence

The percentage of pupils missing 10% or more of their possible mornings and afternoons.

Year	This school
2024/25 (2 term)	56.1%
2023/24 (3 term)	53.8%
2022/23 (3 term)	38.9%

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.

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