

Inspection of Orion Academy

Knights Road, Blackbird Leys, Oxford, Oxfordshire OX4 6DQ

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 June 2024

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

The associate headteacher of this school is Jessie Shakespeare and the head of school is Hannah Shuker. This school is part of The Gallery Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer, Kay Willett MBE, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Chris Scrivener. There is also an executive headteacher, Rebecca Holmes.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a welcoming and supportive school where pupils receive a high level of support. Staff understand pupils' social and emotional needs well and build positive relationships. Pupils feel safe and trust staff to help them. Bullying is not an issue. When pupils display challenging behaviour, well-trained, caring staff are on hand to help them settle and refocus. However, pupils do not attend school as often as they should.

Since joining The Gallery Trust in February 2020, leaders have overcome many challenges, such as the pandemic, staffing changes and transition to a new-build site. However, the trust has been too slow to implement an ambitious curriculum. Pupils are not taught well enough in all subjects, and the school has not given enough consideration to how learning will build year on year. As a result, pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

The school is now improving. The new leadership team has successfully established a positive, aspirational community culture with high expectations for behaviour. The team is rightly focused on redesigning the curriculum. Improvements have been made, but there is still work to ensure the curriculum is ambitious and caters effectively for pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

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

After a period of challenge and change, the school is now on a positive journey. Concerns around site safety and standards of behaviour have been addressed successfully. However, the school's curriculum is not currently effective. Curriculum planning does not meet the needs of mixed-age and mixed-ability classes well enough. As a result, teachers are having to work hard to make it work. Reassuringly, recent improvements in some subjects have added clarity and ambition to the curriculum, enabling pupils to achieve well. However, in other subjects, the knowledge that pupils should learn, and in what order, has not been defined.

The quality of teaching is inconsistent. Teachers do not always have the subject knowledge needed to deliver the curriculum confidently. Some staff adapt their lessons in response to pupils' needs or what pupils know, while others do not. This leaves some pupils disengaged and unable to access their learning. As a result, some pupils are not making the progress they should. Similarly, where staff use pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans well to guide their work, learning is broken down carefully into small steps, enabling pupils to build on their prior knowledge. However, this is not yet consistently the case.

A rigorous early reading curriculum is now in place. When pupils join the school, accurate and precise assessments are used to check their reading knowledge. Staff receive high-quality training that enables them to ably support pupils with learning to read. As a result, many pupils are becoming confident and fluent readers.

Too many pupils do not attend regularly, which means they miss out on everything the school has to offer. Rigorous systems are in place to establish pupils' whereabouts and seek assurances about their well-being. However, the school is yet to develop an effective strategy to improve attendance.

When in school, pupils behave well. Staff act swiftly and effectively to tackle any signs of low-level disruption. Reward systems help motivate pupils to behave well. Regular 'check-ins' with pupils about their feelings help them manage their emotions. When pupils are upset or angry, a well-trained pastoral team is on hand to help them calm down using consistent and positive language. As a result, learning is rarely disrupted.

Personal development is a real strength. Pupils access a raft of fun and engaging activities. Trips and experiences enrich pupils' curriculum, building their confidence and supporting them in developing pro-social behaviours. A well-established careers programme ensures that pupils receive effective support to plan their next steps at age 16. An ambitious personal, social and health education curriculum helps pupils understand how to stay safe online and issues such as consent.

Leaders have acted decisively in recent times to improve the school. The school is considerate of staff's well-being and workload. As a result, staff feel valued and eager to participate in the school's improvement journey. The trust and trustees are supporting the school through the recent introduction of a 'rapid improvement board', which is intended to strengthen governance further. However, those responsible for governance do not, collectively, evaluate the school's priorities accurately, which impedes the effectiveness of their support and challenge.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Too many pupils do not attend school regularly, adversely affecting their education and causing them to miss out on important personal development opportunities. The school should urgently establish a coherent strategy to improve attendance, ensuring that rigorous oversight enables it to monitor and assure itself about the impact of this work.
- The curriculum is not currently mapped out clearly or implemented to a high enough standards. Consequently, pupils do not learn well enough. The school should ensure that curriculum planning clearly identifies what pupils must learn in each subject and that staff have the knowledge to teach this content successfully. They should also support staff in using assessment consistently well to check pupils' understanding and inform future teaching.

- There are gaps in how pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted. This means pupils are not as prepared for life in modern Britain as they could be. The school must continue to improve the personal, social and health education curriculum to ensure that pupils gain the important knowledge they need, so they leave school with an understanding of different faiths and cultures, fundamental British values, and protected characteristics.
- Those responsible for governance do not always have an accurate view of the school's priorities and do not rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of improvement work. This means that they do not effectively challenge and support leaders, and have been ineffectual in addressing some important weaknesses in a timely fashion. Those responsible for governance must ensure that they are fully informed about the school's priorities and hold leaders accountable for addressing areas for improvement effectively and promptly.

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	147728
Local authority	Oxfordshire
Inspection number	10322046
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	10 to 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	80
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Chris Scrivener
Chief executive officer	Kay Willet MBE
Headteacher	Jessie Shakespeare (associate headteacher) Hannah Shuker (head of school)
Website	www.orionacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The school provides specialist provision for pupils from across Oxfordshire on behalf of the local authority. All pupils who attend this school have an EHC plan with a primary need for social, emotional and mental health.
- There have been some recent changes in the senior leadership team. A new headteacher was appointed in June 2024.
- At the time of inspection, the school was governed by a 'Rapid Improvement Board' appointed by the board of trustees, which had delegated powers and responsibility to improve the school.
- At the time of inspection, the school used two registered and four unregistered providers of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. 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 executive headteacher, associate headteacher, head of school and other senior leaders. The lead inspector met the chair of the board of trustees and a member of the rapid improvement board. He held a separate meeting with the deputy chief executive officers of the trust.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, mathematics, personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and science. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to pupils and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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 spoke with pupils informally in lessons and during breaktimes and lunchtimes. They took into account the views of staff during meetings with them and from their responses to Ofsted's confidential staff survey.
- Inspectors took account of the views of parents through their responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, and parents' free-text comments.

Inspection team

James Stuart, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Louise Ling

Ofsted Inspector

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