

A BEST Success Story

#8 – Gravenhurst Academy: Outstanding Ofsted Report

Summer 2024



A small school with big ambitions.

That is how Gravenhurst Academy was described in its Outstanding Ofsted report following inspection in March 2024.

It was the lower school's second successive top grading – a fantastic achievement underlined

by data that shows only around 3% of small schools were rated Outstanding in their most recent inspections.

Gravenhurst's continued success can be attributed to a multitude of factors, not least the hard work and commitment of everyone in the school community.

Another key component is the support the school receives from being part of BEST.

This comes not just in the form of our central Education Services and School Improvement Team (BESSI), but also the unique partnership it shares with another BEST school, Langford Village Academy.

This is the story of Gravenhurst Academy's Outstanding Ofsted report.



GRAVENHURST AT A GLANCE

- 0.5FE village school (Reception-Year 4)
- Rural location in Upper Gravenhurst
- Smallest school in BEST
- Had also been rated Outstanding in previous Ofsted inspection, in 2011

‘ Pupils flourish in the school's friendly environment. They say the school is like a big family, where everyone cares for each other

– Ofsted Inspection Report, March 2024

62/19

Number of pupils and staff at Gravenhurst Academy
(at time of Ofsted inspection in March 2024)

Outstanding grade is 'a team achievement'

Many elements came together like "pieces of a jigsaw" to help Gravenhurst Academy be rated Outstanding again by Ofsted. Principal Debbie Randall, *pictured right*, highlighted the major factors that had a positive influence, from what happens in the classroom to the wider support available through the school's membership of BEST.

She said: "With a small school things are challenging, and just because you were Outstanding before it's not a given that it's going to carry on.

"It's all pieces of a jigsaw but the bottom line, really, is high quality teaching and learning. You can put lots of measures in place and have plenty of support, but if you haven't got high quality teachers you are not going to get Outstanding.

"Our result is definitely a team achievement – my staff always go the extra mile to ensure our children get the best education possible, and our parents are very supportive, too."

She said the continual backing of the BESSI team and using the two schools she is head of – Gravenhurst and Langford Village Academy – as a partnership meant she could maintain high standards.

"One thing that really supported me a lot from the trust was the fact because Gravenhurst is so small, when Ofsted come you've got to be knowledgeable in every subject in quite a lot of depth and it's really difficult," Mrs Randall said.

"But I've got subject co-ordinators working across my two schools and to supplement that the BEST curriculum directors have all come across to do lots of monitoring to make sure everything is on track. It's like having an extended family."

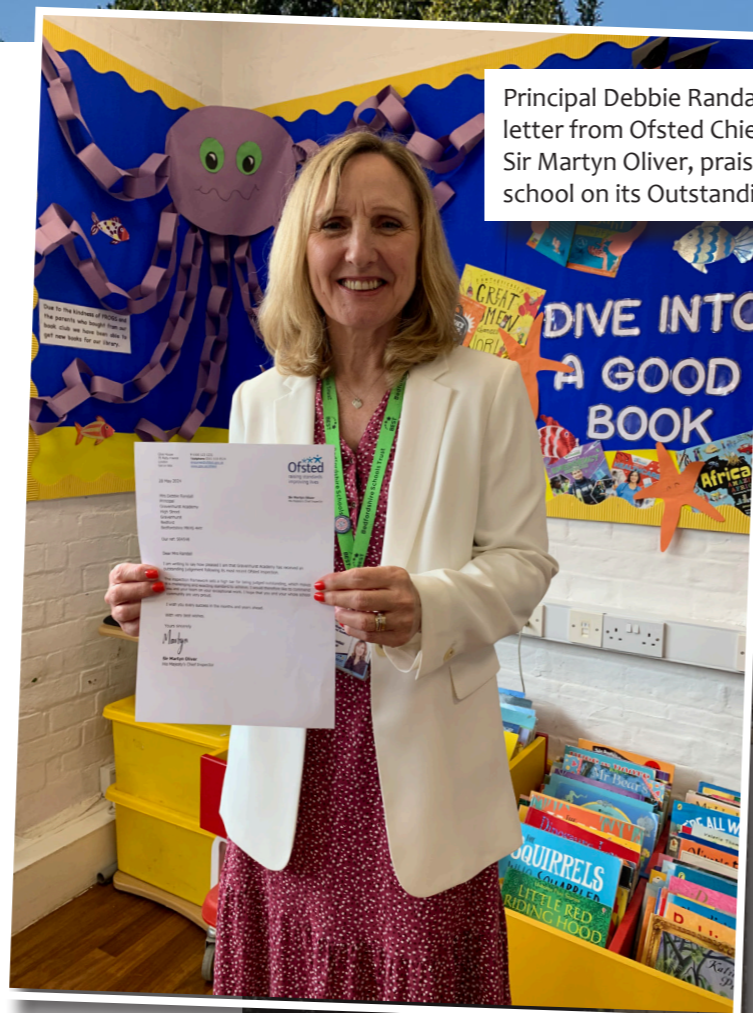
She added: "On the inspection days themselves, having BEST colleagues here really does make a difference. It is a very stressful experience and to have the trust there and living every moment with you is very, very reassuring.

"Alison Wilshaw [BEST Director of Education] and her team do an amazing job and because they've got so much experience of Ofsted inspections through the trust, it's so helpful."

Ms Wilshaw said: "We feel it is important to harness the energy and purpose all teachers have and help to nurture them in a positive way so they feel supported.

"We share their ambition to provide the students in our care with as successful an education as possible.

"During the inspection at Gravenhurst, we supported during the deep dives, ensuring the inspector accessed the full picture of the excellent work teachers and subject leaders do day in, day out."



Principal Debbie Randall with a letter from Ofsted Chief Inspector Sir Martyn Oliver, praising the school on its Outstanding grading



BESSI expertise on offer throughout the year

Our central BESSI team is an integral part of all our schools – not just for an inspection, but through the entire academic year.

BEST Director of Maths Alan Stupple said while it was "literally all hands on deck" during the actual Ofsted visit, the support on offer from himself and his fellow curriculum directors stretched much further.

He said: "Over the last school year I've been at Gravenhurst weekly – from delivering inset training in September and working with teachers to design the curriculum, to things like learning walks.

"Then, at the inspection, we're all at the school for whatever support the headteacher might want us to be there for.

"On the two days of the Gravenhurst Ofsted we were

in deep dives, we put together documents needed for supporting evidence and I covered Year 1/2 maths and English lessons.

"We do whatever is needed to support the school in getting the outcome it deserves."

Mr Stupple added: "If you look at the stats, it's hard for a small school to be judged Outstanding. So this is a fantastic achievement for everyone at Gravenhurst and for BEST."

BEST Director of Education Alison Wilshaw said: "We've enjoyed working with the staff at Gravenhurst throughout the year in many ways, from sitting on the governing body and helping with book looks to running curriculum meetings and providing leadership capacity a day a week."



It's not just 'all hands on deck' during an Ofsted inspection – at Gravenhurst it was all webbed feet, too!

With World Book Day taking place that week, the school had organised for pupils to be visited by larger-than-life character Freddy the Fresh Air Frog.

BEST Director of Education Alison Wilshaw said: "The inspector said afterwards that such an event had the potential to be chaotic, but it really showed off the confidence of an Outstanding school to still go ahead even with the inspection taking place."

And just to underline the team effort, the face behind the mask was Ollie, one of the school's technicians from our ICT provider Partnership Education!

Being part of the BEST family contributes to our success due to the support we get

– Debbie Randall,
Principal

The partnership with Langford Village Academy is another big piece in the jigsaw of Gravenhurst's success.

Subject co-ordinators work across the two schools, which helps to strengthen the curriculum offering of both.

Gary Gotham, who is Assistant Principal at Langford and maths lead, said: "We have the same curriculum in terms of long-term plans, that way it makes it easier for subject co-ordinators to go across and to monitor what's being delivered. We can share expertise and share planning.

"Because Gravenhurst is such a small school, only having three teachers, it would make it very difficult to lead on everything, so the idea of having that shared leadership is that we can go over and support them where possible."

English lead Joy Mead said: "From Gravenhurst's point of view it's having an extra person to do some of that legwork. And really, it's a whole team effort across the trust, with the BEST curriculum leaders as well."

Heidi Mellor, KS1 teacher and science lead at Gravenhurst, said the additional support across both schools and from BESSI colleagues was "exactly what was needed" and helped them to prepare for Ofsted.

She added: "We are very proud of our little school!"



What Ofsted inspectors said

- From the moment children join in Reception, they are encouraged to be curious. They develop an enthusiasm for learning that grows as they move through the school.
- Relationships between pupils and adults are warm and nurturing.
- The school and trust have put in place an ambitious curriculum. It is thoughtfully designed to give pupils the key knowledge they need in each subject.
- Pupils' behaviour in the classroom is exemplary. This is thanks to engaging lessons, consistent routines and clear adult modelling of the expected standards.
- The programme for pupils' personal development is impressive.
- Trust and school leaders are determined to provide the best possible experiences for pupils.
- Governors... understand their role. They use it effectively to challenge leaders and support the school to realise its ambitious goals.
- Parents' view of the school is overwhelmingly positive.

Read the report in full online at reports.ofsted.gov.uk

WHY THIS IS A SUCCESS STORY...

- School continuing to deliver Outstanding education provision to community
- Expertise of wider BESSI team making a difference and having impact in a small school
- Partnership between Gravenhurst and Langford providing added benefit
- Demonstrates how small schools can thrive in a multi-academy trust



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