

Person Specification

The Orchard School is seeking a highly credible, thoughtful and ambitious senior leader who can combine strategic thinking, operational strength and relational leadership.

The successful candidate will understand the complexity of leading within an SEMH special school and will demonstrate a strong commitment to our mission:

Everyone Matters. Everyone Cares.

They will model and promote our school rules:

Ready-Respectful-Safe

and our values:

Trust-Belonging-Aspiration-Voice-Pride-Curiosity

The successful candidate will understand that leadership at The Orchard is rooted in relationships, high expectations, curiosity, consistency and care.

Qualifications and Professional Standing

Essential

- Qualified Teacher Status
- Successful teaching experience
- Senior leadership experience within a special school, alternative provision or complex mainstream setting
- Evidence of relevant continuing professional development
- Strong knowledge of current educational expectations and statutory responsibilities

Desirable

- Relevant leadership qualification, such as NPQSL, NPQH or equivalent
- Experience of working with pupils with SEMH, autism and/or additional SEND

Strategic Leadership and School Improvement

Essential

- Evidence of successfully leading significant school improvement activity
- Ability to translate strategic priorities into clear actions and measurable outcomes
- Strong understanding of school self-evaluation and improvement planning
- Ability to monitor implementation and evaluate impact
- Confidence in challenging inconsistency and underperformance appropriately
- Ability to maintain strategic focus within a complex operational environment
- Strong analytical skills and the ability to use evidence to inform decision-making
- Ability to contribute confidently to whole-school strategic thinking and planning

Desirable

- Experience of leading whole-school improvement following external review or inspection
- Experience of contributing to governor reporting and accountability processes

Leadership, Coaching and Development of Others

Essential

- Ability to provide visible, credible and consistent leadership
- Ability to build trust while maintaining professional accountability
- Confidence in holding difficult conversations and providing appropriate challenge
- Ability to use coaching approaches to develop reflection, ownership and professional growth
- Ability to support leaders and staff to identify strengths, barriers and next steps
- Strong communication and interpersonal skills
- Ability to develop leadership capacity across a school
- Ability to support staff development without creating dependency
- Calm, respectful and solution-focused leadership style
- Ability to balance support, challenge and accountability appropriately

Desirable

- Experience of using coaching approaches with leaders and staff
- Experience of appraisal, succession planning and leadership development
- Experience of developing middle or senior leaders

Safeguarding

Essential

- Strong understanding of safeguarding practice and statutory expectations
- Ability to exercise sound professional judgement in complex safeguarding situations
- Confidence supporting staff with safeguarding decision-making
- Ability to work effectively with families and external agencies
- Commitment to maintaining a strong safeguarding culture across the school
- Understanding of the importance of pupil voice within safeguarding practice
- Experience as a Designated Safeguarding Lead or Deputy DSL

Desirable

- Experience of complex multi-agency safeguarding work
- Experience of safeguarding quality assurance and staff training

Attendance

Essential

- Strong understanding of the strategic importance of attendance
- Ability to analyse attendance patterns and identify priorities
- Understanding of persistent absence and barriers to attendance
- Ability to evaluate the impact of attendance interventions
- Ability to balance statutory expectations with relational and inclusive practice
- Confidence working with families, professionals and the local authority to improve attendance
- Understanding of attendance as a whole-school responsibility

Desirable

- Experience of providing strategic leadership of attendance
- Experience of reporting attendance trends and impact to governors or external stakeholders

Behaviour, Culture and The Orchard Way

Essential

- Strong understanding of behaviour as communication
- Commitment to therapeutic and relational practice
- Ability to maintain high expectations alongside a compassionate and individualised approach
- Ability to lead calmly and confidently during challenging situations
- Understanding of the importance of consistency, routine and adult behaviour
- Ability to support staff in responding effectively to dysregulation and complex behaviour
- Commitment to restorative and repair-focused approaches
- Ability to model and promote **Ready-Respectful-Safe**
- Understanding of the importance of belonging, trust and relational safety
- Ability to respond with curiosity rather than judgement

Desirable

- Experience of leading behaviour and culture within an SEMH, SEND or similarly complex setting
- Experience of implementing therapeutic or relational approaches across a school

Systems, Technology and Whole-School Implementation

Essential

- Ability to oversee and improve whole-school systems

- Confidence using management information and data to support leadership decision-making
- Ability to implement agreed approaches consistently across teams and phases
- Strong organisational skills and attention to follow-through
- Ability to identify where systems are creating unnecessary complexity and improve them
- Confidence working across different leadership portfolios while respecting clear areas of responsibility
- Ability to support implementation without unnecessarily taking ownership away from other leaders

Desirable

- Experience of strategic use of adaptive or assistive technology
- Experience of MIS, digital systems or technology-led school improvement
- Experience of consultation, admission or placement processes within specialist provision

Data, Monitoring and Evaluation

Essential

- Ability to analyse and interpret a range of school information
- Ability to identify trends, strengths and areas of concern
- Ability to evaluate the impact of leadership actions and interventions
- Ability to use monitoring activity to drive clear follow-up and improvement
- Confidence presenting information clearly to senior leaders, governors and other stakeholders
- Ability to distinguish between activity and impact
- Commitment to using evidence proportionately and intelligently

Desirable

- Experience of developing monitoring and evaluation systems
- Experience of using behaviour, attendance, safeguarding or achievement data strategically

Operational Leadership and Deputising for the Headteacher

Essential

- Ability to contribute effectively to the day-to-day running of a complex school
- Ability to make sound decisions and take responsibility
- Ability to prioritise effectively when managing competing demands
- Strong professional judgement
- Ability to remain calm, visible and decisive under pressure

- Ability to lead the school confidently in the Headteacher's absence
- Ability to maintain oversight of safeguarding, staffing, behaviour, attendance and school operations
- Credibility with staff, pupils, families and external professionals
- Ability to recognise when to act independently and when to seek further advice or support

Desirable

- Previous experience of deputising for a Headteacher
- Experience of significant whole-school operational responsibility

Partnerships and Accountability

Essential

- Ability to build positive and respectful relationships with pupils
- Ability to communicate confidently and professionally with families, including in difficult or escalated situations
- Ability to work collaboratively with local authority officers and external professionals
- Ability to represent the school professionally in meetings and external forums
- Understanding of governance and school accountability
- Commitment to ensuring pupil voice informs leadership decisions where appropriate
- Ability to work effectively as part of a senior leadership team

Desirable

- Experience of working closely with governors
- Experience of complex partnership or multi-agency working

Personal Qualities

Essential

The successful candidate will demonstrate:

- integrity
- resilience
- emotional intelligence
- sound judgement
- curiosity
- consistency
- humility
- courage
- warmth
- professionalism

- ambition for pupils and staff
- commitment to continuous improvement
- willingness to listen, reflect and adapt
- confidence without arrogance
- the ability to remain grounded when under pressure

They will understand that high expectations and therapeutic practice belong together.
They will be able to challenge without becoming confrontational, support without lowering expectations, and lead with both confidence and care.
They will recognise that strong leadership is not simply about having the answer, but about helping others think, reflect, grow and take responsibility.

Alignment with The Orchard Way

Essential

The successful candidate must demonstrate clear commitment to:

Everyone Matters. Everyone Cares.

and to our values:

- **Trust**
- **Belonging**
- **Aspiration**
- **Voice**
- **Pride**
- **Curiosity**

They must also model and promote:

Ready-Respectful-Safe

They will:

- recognise behaviour as communication
- prioritise relationships while maintaining clear expectations
- respond with curiosity rather than judgement
- understand that connection builds safety
- value pupil and staff voice
- promote a culture of reflection, learning and repair
- demonstrate ambition for pupils whose educational experiences may previously have been difficult

Additional Strengths and Portfolio Flexibility

The successful candidate may bring additional strengths in areas such as:

- teaching and learning
- curriculum
- SEND and inclusion
- behaviour and culture
- technology
- assessment and data

- staff development
- coaching
- operational leadership

These strengths may inform the final portfolio of the postholder, while respecting the established responsibilities of other members of the senior leadership team.

The core expectations of the role will remain:

- deputising for the Headteacher
- safeguarding
- strategic leadership of attendance
- school improvement
- whole-school leadership
- behaviour, culture and The Orchard Way
- leadership, coaching and development of others

The precise portfolio will be agreed with the successful candidate, taking account of their experience, strengths and areas of expertise alongside the school's existing leadership structure and priorities.