

Shernold School

Hill Place, Queens Avenue, Maidstone, Kent ME16 0ER

Inspection dates

20–22 April 2016

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Inadequate
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Inadequate
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an inadequate school

- Pupils are not safe because leaders, including those in the early years, do not know or fulfil their statutory responsibilities regarding the safeguarding of pupils.
- Leadership is weak because no single person is responsible for the school. Consequently, there is no strategic oversight. Leaders do not have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. There are no clear lines of accountability and hence important aspects of the school's work are overlooked.
- Governance is ineffective because the sole proprietor does not hold school leaders to account. Responsibilities for meeting statutory requirements are not met.
- Some of the statutory pre-employment checks have not been carried out on staff. This means that leaders, including those in the early years, cannot be sure that staff are safe to work with children.
- Leaders have not taken effective action to improve some of the issues identified at the previous inspection in 2010. For example, the school still does not provide a suitable medical room and thus it does not meet the medical needs of some pupils.
- The school does not actively promote British values so pupils are not as well prepared for life in modern Britain as they should be.
- The school does not ensure the welfare of pupils. Weak leadership and governance has resulted in day-to-day tasks being overlooked. For example, there are nails protruding at eye level from play equipment.
- The school's complaints policy and admissions register do not comply with requirements.
- Leaders have not ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.

The school has the following strengths

- The quality of teaching is good because teachers are self-reliant. They plan and deliver lessons which meet pupils' needs well. As a result, pupils make good progress in all subjects. They achieve well at the end of key stage 1 and 2. High proportions pass the examinations needed to attend grammar schools.
- Children in the early years make good progress from their above average starting points. Almost all reach a good level of development and are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.
- Pupils behave well throughout the school. They respond well to the school's code of conduct and routines. They settle down to work quickly.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school must take action to meet the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Urgently improve the safeguarding and welfare arrangements for pupils in the school and ensure that all of the independent school standards are met by:
 - completing and recording all necessary checks on existing staff
 - having rigorous procedures in place when employing new staff
 - ensuring that those responsible for safeguarding and employment of staff complete all necessary training
 - making sure that the single central record complies with statutory requirements
 - taking action to provide appropriate medical facilities to meet pupils' needs
 - enabling pupils to be better prepared for life in modern Britain by teaching them about British values
 - ensuring that the admissions register and the complaints policy fully comply with the regulations
 - ensuring play equipment and resources meet health and safety requirements.

- Rapidly improve leadership and management by:
 - reorganising responsibilities and accountabilities of the leadership team so that someone has overall responsibility and strategic oversight of the school
 - ensuring leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses
 - ensuring that those responsible for governance fully hold leaders to account and understand the independent school standards.

- The school must meet the following independent school standards.
 - Actively promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs (paragraph 5, 5(a)).
 - The proprietor must ensure that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school and that such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraph 7, 7(a) and 7(b)).
 - The proprietor must ensure that an admission register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 15).
 - The proprietor must ensure that the medical fitness of all staff is checked in relation to their ability to carry out their duties (paragraph 18(2) and 18(2)(c)(ii)).
 - The proprietor must ensure that no person is barred from regulated activity within the meaning of Part 1 of Schedule 4 to that act. That no person carries out work, or intends to carry out work, at the school in contravention of a prohibition order, an interim prohibition order, or any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act, or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in either such direction (paragraph 18(2)(a)(b)(c))
 - The proprietor must ensure that an individual ("MB"), not being the Chair of the school, who is a member of a body of persons corporate or unincorporate [is] named as the proprietor of the school in the register or in an application to enter the school in the register (paragraph 20 (b))
 - The proprietor must keep a register which shows such of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question. The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is in relation to each member of staff ("S") appointed on or after 1st May 2007; a check was made to establish whether S is barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the 2006 Act; a check was made to establish whether S is subject to any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in such a direction; and in relation to each member of staff ("S"), whether a check was made to establish whether S is subject to a prohibition order or an interim prohibition order, including the date on which such check was completed (paragraph 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(ii), 21(3)(a)(iii), 21(3)(b)) 18(2)(b)).
 - Ensure suitable accommodation is provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils which includes accommodation for the medical examination and treatment of pupils (paragraph

24(1)(a)).

- The proprietor must ensure that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured (paragraph 25).
- The proprietor must ensure that the complaints policy allows for a parent to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish (paragraph 33(h)).
- Ensure that leaders have sufficient skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently. To ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities effectively and actively promote the well-being of pupils (paragraph 34(1)(a)(b)(c)).

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

is inadequate

- Leaders and managers have not ensured that pupils are safe. They do not know or fulfil their statutory safeguarding responsibilities. There are serious weaknesses in the pre-employment checks regarding the suitability of staff. Checks on whether a teacher has been prohibited from teaching have not been conducted. The school does not comply with the statutory guidance regarding disqualification. No one in the school has carried out the mandatory safer recruitment training. The single central register that records details of all staff employed at the school is missing vital information. As a result, it is an inadequate tool in ensuring that pupils are kept safe.
- Leadership and management are ineffective. No one has overall responsibility for leading the school. Although there is a 'headteacher', her role is limited to ensuring effective teaching and learning. Other senior leadership roles are not sufficiently elevated to mitigate this weakness, so no one has clear oversight or responsibility for what needs to be done. As a result, key aspects of the school's work are overlooked. This fragmented and unclear leadership has had a negative impact on the overall culture of the school, leading to a lack of confidence from parents.
- At the start of the inspection, those in leadership positions were unaware of the statutory requirements placed upon them regarding the independent school standards. There are several standards which are unmet.
- Many parents contacted the inspection team to report their deep frustration regarding the leadership of the school. They say that no one has any accountability. They find the title 'headteacher' misleading because she is not in charge of the school. Responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View, showed that half of parents would not recommend the school to another parent.
- School leaders do not have an accurate view of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They do not have a coherent strategy for checking on different aspects of the school's work over time.
- The admissions register does not meet requirements because the phone numbers of parents are not recorded. However, the office does have a record elsewhere of parents' contact details.
- The complaints policy does not conform to requirements because it does not allow for parents to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish.
- The curriculum does not actively promote British values. Pupils are unclear about concepts such as democracy and the rule of law. However, pupils do study different faiths and religions and know about respect and tolerance. Other aspects of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Teachers follow the new national curriculum and provide pupils with a varied range of experiences, particularly in drama. A wide range of extra-curricular activities are offered, including sports and creative subjects.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governance is not effective. It consists of one person who is the sole proprietor. There is little understanding of the independent school standards or the safeguarding issues facing the school.
 - Governance does not fulfil its statutory responsibilities. Governance does not hold leaders to account or provide adequate challenge.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective. The school cannot guarantee the welfare of pupils. Systems are not in place for checking and recording the suitability of adults to work with children. Mandatory training in safer recruitment has not been completed.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

is good

- Ineffective leadership is not having a negative impact on the good quality of teaching in the school. This is because individual teachers are very self-reliant and reflective of their practice. They plan lessons that carefully meet the needs of pupils.
- Teachers have high expectations. In lessons there is a relentless focus on learning and pupils are encouraged to strive continuously to improve. Effective teaching enables pupils to achieve success at the end of both key stage 1 and 2. Pupils are also very successful in examinations relating to grammar school admission.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Staff know their pupils well and pupils value the intensive support they receive. They enjoy their lessons and work hard to make their teachers proud of them. When asked, pupils said how pleased they were with the progress they had made in every subject.

- Teachers support pupils effectively and provide individualised explanations that clearly focus on what each pupil needs. As a result, pupils confidently ask for help when they do not understand an aspect of their learning.
- Teachers assess pupils' learning and progress continually. There are regular test papers and teachers use this information to plan lessons that are aimed at helping all pupils make strong progress. In lessons, teachers carefully check pupils' work and provide guidance to them on how to improve.
- Those who are at risk of falling behind are provided with an individually tailored programme of support. These are highly effective and pupils, including those who are new to the school, quickly catch up. Teaching assistants work diligently to ensure that pupils are given the support they need to make good progress.
- Those pupils who are most able are provided with additional challenging work that usually meets their needs. However, in some lessons work could have been provided which was more challenging. In mathematics, pupils work with a local grammar school; they attend workshops and complete mathematics challenges. In English, the most-able pupils are often put in for external national competitions. Initiatives such as these enable the most able to make good progress.
- In all subjects, teachers continually strengthen pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. For example, in history pupils had researched and written extensively about different aspects of ancient Greek life.
- Pupils benefit from the skills of specialist staff in science, French, music, physical education and religious education. Pupils demonstrate good progress in all of these subjects.
- All of the independent school standards for teaching, learning and assessment are met.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is inadequate

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is inadequate. Leaders and managers have not ensured that the independent school standards relating to welfare are met. This means that the safety and well-being of pupils is not assured.
- The school's medical room is inadequate. This issue was highlighted at the last inspection in 2010 and since then there has been no change. Pupils are treated in a room housing a toilet which has just about enough room for a camp bed. The space is not large enough for the medical examination and treatment of pupils.
- Although the school completes risk assessments, during the inspection significant potential hazards were noted on some of the old and poorly maintained play equipment.
- All fire safety equipment is professionally serviced and fire safety checks are carried out. The school has regular fire drills.
- An effective programme of personal, social, health and economic education is delivered to all pupils by a specialist teacher. Pupils have been taught how to keep themselves safe. They know about potential dangers when online and how important it is not to divulge personal details when using the internet.
- Those pupils who have been given additional responsibilities, such as school captains, fulfil their roles conscientiously. This has a positive impact on their personal development. All pupils are confident and know that their views will be listened to.
- The breakfast club enables pupils to have a nourishing start to the day.
- The school has good transition arrangements in place which prepare pupils well for their next stage of education.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- School records, and the majority of parents and pupils, confirm that behaviour is good.
- Outside of lessons, pupils treat each other with courtesy and respect. Older pupils are kind to the younger year groups. Year 6 pupils reported how much they enjoyed looking after their buddies in Year 1.
- In classrooms, behaviour is good. Pupils listen attentively to what the teacher is saying and act on their requests. Books are very neatly presented.
- While a few parents expressed concerns regarding bullying, pupils reported that bullying was not a problem. They said that the only issues were when friends occasionally fell out. They said that they were confident that if they had any concerns their teacher would quickly sort it out.
- Attendance is good and few pupils miss days off school except through illness. There have been no exclusions.

Outcomes for pupils

are good

- Pupils make good progress from their starting points in all year groups and subjects.
- Last year in key stage 1, the proportion of pupils who gained Level 2 was significantly above the national averages in reading, writing and mathematics. Almost all pupils gained the higher Level 3 in reading.
- In 2015 in key stage 2, all pupils gained the expected standard in writing, mathematics, spelling punctuation and grammar. Over two thirds of the pupils reached the higher Level 5 in all subjects. This demonstrates the effectiveness of teaching. A higher percentage than the national average attained the highest Level 6 in mathematics.
- Last year over two thirds of the Year 5 pupils passed the entrance examinations into the local grammar schools. This year over 80% of pupils were successful.
- Those pupils who are most able make strong progress from their starting points. They thrive because teachers and teaching assistants constantly challenge them to do even better.
- Pupils who have special educational needs achieve well over time and often better than the national average. This is because teachers make sure that pupils really understand a concept before moving on.
- All pupils enjoy reading a range of materials both at home and in school. They read confidently and accurately. Strong early reading and writing skills enable pupils to achieve well throughout the school.
- In writing, pupils rapidly develop sophisticated skills in describing characters and settings. When asked, pupils said how much they enjoyed creative writing. One pupil said, 'Sometimes it is just like going into another world.'
- In mathematics, pupils have extensive opportunities to reason mathematically and develop their fluency and problem-solving skills. Books and records of practical investigations show that pupils make rapid progress in this subject.
- Pupils said how much they enjoyed the 'hands on' activities they did in science. They said that they were doing well because the activities were so interesting. Evidence seen in books confirms that pupils are making rapid progress.
- By the end of Year 6 pupils demonstrate good verbal and also written skills in French. Books show that many pupils can write several sentences accurately.
- In sports, pupils enjoy a range of activities. Pupils were very proud of their recent football success and were looking forward excitedly to representing South East England in the 'small schools' football tournament.
- Pupils from all ethnic backgrounds make similar progress. There are no disadvantaged pupils who attend this school.

Early years provision

is inadequate

- The school does not meet the independent school standards relating to the early years. This is because welfare arrangements are not met and safeguarding is ineffective. Leadership is inadequate because checks regarding the suitability of staff are not carried out.
- Children enter the early years with skills and abilities that are above those typical for their age. They make good progress because teachers and teaching assistants carefully track children's learning. Children receive regular individual attention. They are provided with exciting learning opportunities that are carefully planned to develop the next steps in learning.
- Almost all children reach the early learning goals by the end of Reception. Particular strengths are in children's understanding of phonics (letters and the sounds that they make) and in their number knowledge. Those children who are most able and who have already reached the early learning goals are provided with additional challenging activities. These enable them to consolidate their skills. Most children are well prepared for their learning in Year 1.
- Parents reported that they were happy with the provision in the early years. They say they are kept well informed and that their children had made strong progress. Parents often share with staff milestones children have achieved at home.
- Children behave well and have effective communication skills. They know the importance of saying 'please' and 'thank you' when sharing resources. They treat each other with respect.
- The outside area is exciting and offers a variety of different activities, such as the vegetable garden and mud kitchen.

School details

Unique reference number	118972
Inspection number	10008565
DfE registration number	886/6030

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Preparatory School
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	143
Number of part-time pupils	7
Proprietor	Valerie Waite
Headteacher	Sandra Dinsmore
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,525–£7,425
Telephone number	01622 752 868
Website	shernoldschool.co.uk
Email address	shernold@shernold.plus.com
Date of previous inspection	9–10 February 2010

Information about this school

- Shernold Preparatory School is an independent co-educational school which was registered in 1935. The last inspection of this school was in February 2010 when it was judged to be good. The school is situated in a residential area of Maidstone in a large Victorian detached house with outbuildings.
- The early years foundation stage (Kindergarten) consists of a Nursery with 15 children on roll where approximately half of the children attend full-time. There are 19 children who attend full-time in the Reception class.
- Class sizes in the rest of the school vary, but on average there are between 15 and 20 pupils in each class.
- The school aims are 'to develop confident, caring, enquiring individuals who are successful learners well prepared for adult life'.
- Most of the pupils are from White British backgrounds, although an increasing proportion are from other ethnic backgrounds. There are no pupils who are at an early stage of learning English. There are very few pupils who are identified as having special educational needs or disability.
- The school does not make use of alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in a range of subjects. There were 10 lessons and part lessons visited, one of which was observed jointly with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with pupils. Inspectors looked at work in books and listened to some pupils reading. There were also informal discussions with pupils at breaktime regarding what it was like to be a pupil at this school.
- Inspectors took account of 48 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire and also spoke to parents at the end of the school day. Several parents were also telephoned as they had requested that the inspection team contact them to hear their views.
- Staff responses from 23 staff questionnaires were also considered.
- Inspectors looked at a range of documentation and policies including information about pupils' current attainment and progress. Documents checking the quality of teaching and learning and records relating to behaviour, attendance, child protection and safeguarding were also examined.

Inspection team

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