

# Wickham Court School

Layhams Road, West Wickham, Kent BR4 9HW

## Inspection dates

9–11 May 2017

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is a good school

- The principal has improved the school dramatically since the last inspection. It is now consistently good in all areas.
- The proprietor and leaders ensure that the school meets all of the independent school standards.
- Safeguarding practice is rigorous; all staff take responsibility for promoting pupils' well-being. Staff meet pupils' personal development and individual needs extremely well.
- Children from the Reception class achieve well in English and mathematics. They enjoy reading and apply their literacy and computing skills in different subjects skilfully.
- Teaching is good. Pupils acquire new knowledge because specialist teaching in lessons and clubs encourages pupils to develop new skills in a wide range of subjects.
- Pupils' behaviour and personal development are good. They are proud of their school and comment favourably on its caring and inclusive approach, regardless of pupils' additional needs or abilities.
- Pupils make good progress across a range of subjects. Many pupils attain highly and above expected standards for their age.
- Staff go out of their way to know all pupils exceptionally well. They share a commitment that every pupil achieves their best.
- The proprietor and leaders have an accurate overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. However, some aspects of leaders' plans for improvement lack precision as they do not include timely checks to assess progress toward agreed priorities.
- Leaders and teachers check pupils' learning carefully. Nevertheless, teachers do not always make the best use of assessment information to plan learning so that all groups of pupils make the fastest progress possible.
- Pupils transfer successfully to the next stage in their education from preparatory or senior school, but less well from the Nursery class. Children's abilities are not challenged strongly enough in readiness for the Reception Year.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Strengthen leadership and management by:
  - refining school improvement planning to include precise checks on the school's work to ensure that it meets agreed long-term objectives
  - sharpening leaders' accountability and responsibility for monitoring and evaluating pupils' achievement and skills in their area of responsibility across the school.
- Further improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
  - ensuring that pupil performance information is used to match the learning more closely to pupils' abilities, particularly the most able, so that all pupils make the most rapid progress possible
  - improving Nursery planning and assessment so that children are better prepared to transfer successfully to the Reception class.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management

**Good**

- Proprietors and leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- The principal, strongly supported by her team, shares a passion and commitment that every child attending Wickham Court School succeeds. Staff believe in the inclusive ethos and work together to ensure that every pupil is personally cared for and supported.
- Since the last inspection, the principal has made important decisions about the school's future. The most significant is the new partnership with Alpha Schools Group. Staff welcome the additional challenge and resources the organisation offers a small school.
- The principal leads positively by example. Parents and carers told inspectors that they appreciate contributing to their child's achievements, for example 'wow' certificates for parents to record personal home achievements. The principal knows pupils' individual needs and personalities extremely well. She provides feedback on each pupil's weekly homework project, following up in class or in a one-to-one session if effort and grades slip. Staff, pupils and parents appreciate this attention to detail. A staff response in the questionnaire summarised this, saying, 'The head knows every child's idiosyncrasies and character and so do all the staff.'
- Middle leadership provided by the school's senior teachers is effective. They are keen to have additional responsibility in their specialist areas. Middle leaders carry out peer reviews and oversee standards. They have a sound understanding of the school's strengths and priorities. For example, the English leader already planned to review the key stage 3 scheme of work because she recognises that it overemphasises poetry.
- Leadership and management are not outstanding because the school's assessment framework and policies need further development. Teachers do not routinely use pupil performance information to plan learning which is precisely matched to pupils' different starting points in order to accelerate their progress.
- Leaders are clear about which aspects of the school could be even better, and this is reflected in the strategic plan. Some aspects of the plan, however, do not focus sharply enough on how and when leaders and proprietors will measure how successfully they are achieving long-term priorities. This lessens the impact and accountability of leaders' work on raising standards.
- Leaders ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are continually under review so that most is now consistently good and some better. Teachers' professional development is up to date through appropriate training on the curriculum. They work with colleagues internally to check the accuracy of their judgements on pupils' achievement.
- Leaders promote good literacy skills. Pupils of all ages read widely and often; they do so fluently, often choosing to read indoors at lunchtime. The library is well stocked and up to date with favourite and challenging books chosen by pupils.
- The school strongly promotes British values. Pupils develop meaningful spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. They learn about different cultures and faiths, including their own, represented within the school community. Pupils have opportunities to

participate in a diverse range of cultural and special events, to enrich their knowledge.

- Leaders have designed a well-structured and enjoyable curriculum so that pupils' abilities and interests are met effectively. As a result, pupils are well prepared and confident for the next stage in their education. Additionally, pupils have opportunities to experience boxing, fencing, enterprise and performing Shakespeare's plays within the school timetable and through optional out-of-school activities.

## **Governance**

- Governance of the school is effective.
- Since taking ownership of the school eighteen months ago, the proprietors of Alpha Schools have executed their responsibilities purposefully. They worked closely with the principal to address areas for improvement identified in previous reports, for example by refurbishing the early years environment, securing access to the site and introducing online assessment systems. The principal's professional development includes peer moderation and reviews with partner Alpha schools locally and further afield.
- The proprietors monitor the school's administrative and financial matters effectively and ensure that the school is well resourced.

## **Safeguarding**

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and proprietors take their responsibilities very seriously. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements are thorough and followed diligently. The safeguarding policy is on the school's website; it is compliant with latest statutory guidance. It is updated and shared with parents annually. Statutory checks ensure the suitability of staff to work in school with pupils.
- Staff training is up to date and all staff have current knowledge of safeguarding requirements. Staff are vigilant about risks posed to pupils. They report concerns to the designated leads who act on this information quickly. Staff prioritise maintaining a strong culture of safety throughout the school.
- Pupils throughout the school have different curriculum opportunities to promote their emotional and physical well-being. As a result, they know how to keep themselves safe.

## **Quality of teaching, learning and assessment**

**Good**

- Teachers' high expectations and good subject knowledge in most areas, particularly English and mathematics, contribute to pupils' effective learning and good progress.
- Teaching is consistently good or better in the majority of classes but especially in the Reception Year, key stage 2 and key stage 4. Inspectors' visits to lessons in these year groups and scrutiny of pupils' work confirm that clear guidance and high expectations for presentation ensure that pupils make steady and continual good progress over time.
- Teaching is most effective when the adults take full advantage of the individual learning opportunities presented by very small class sizes. For example, in a key stage 3 mathematics lesson on solving linear equations, the teacher worked alongside a pupil,

offering specific questions and finding equipment to help explain the task successfully.

- Teachers use their specialist knowledge to provide opportunities for all pupils to deepen their understanding. Most teachers have good subject knowledge; consequently, opportunities to challenge most-able pupils are evident throughout the school. However, on occasion teaching focuses too much on imparting information. For example, pupils' science books show that pupils rarely carry out practical investigations to explore newly acquired concepts.
- In some year groups, teachers' guidance is not always effective in helping pupils understand how to improve their work. Some teachers do not consistently use pupils' performance information to plan learning at the right level for pupils' different abilities and prior understanding. Consequently, more pupils could make faster progress, particularly the most able.

## Personal development, behaviour and welfare

**Good**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- The school is a calm and safe environment where pupils thrive emotionally. Without exception, pupils spoke positively to inspectors about the attention and care they receive from every member of staff, which makes them feel part of a close family.
- Pupils are highly committed to the school. For example, in the preparatory school they take turns willingly as buddy peers on the playtime friendship bench. Senior pupils asked to run a debating club, which recently considered the morality of testing on animals.
- Pupils told inspectors about the school's open culture, saying that bullying is very rare. However, when it does occur they believe that leaders act quickly to prevent a recurrence. Inspectors' assessment of the school's records confirms these views.
- Pupils trust staff to help and support them to be safe. Younger pupils post their concerns in the 'listening-ears box', which the principal addresses anonymously in assemblies. Older pupils email the principal to share personal thoughts or worries. These age-appropriate ways ensure that pupils' welfare and personal needs are met.
- All staff promote pupils' personal development throughout the curriculum. Pupils appreciate different cultures, faiths and lifestyles. They have an in-depth understanding of democracy through school trips and visitors, such as the recent visit from a local mayor. Life in modern Britain is studied through the broad curriculum and a range of other activities.
- Pupils feel safe at school. They know that they can speak to anyone if they need to. Staff receive regular safeguarding training on all current issues.

## Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' manners and behaviour around the school are praiseworthy. They constantly show respect for one another. They listen with empathy when peers relate personal life experiences or sad events in their previous schools.
- The school behaviour policy is implemented effectively. Pupils understand how to earn

rewards and the reasons for receiving sanctions. They work hard to get house points and 'golden time'.

- In some classes, pupils are not given the opportunity to take responsibility to challenge themselves in their work. In these rare cases, they become quietly off task.
- Pupils like coming to school, but attendance is just below the national average. This is because some families take holidays in term time, which is not encouraged by the principal. In other cases, pupils who have medical needs, school refusers or those from the traveller community do not attend regularly. Leaders follow up pupils' absence rigorously.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

**Good**

- Pupils make good progress in school from their individual starting points: first, because effective specialist teaching ensures that pupils acquire new skills, and second, because teachers maximise learning time by ensuring that most pupils receive one-to-one attention.
- Pupils are prepared well for the national curriculum, starting in Reception where strong literacy, mathematics and personal development skills are established. Pupils who remain on roll after the early years maintain good standards throughout the preparatory and senior schools and attain good GCSE results in a wide range of subjects.
- The school has a strong non-selective and inclusive ethos. Pupils, some with complex personal and educational experiences as well as those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are admitted during the year. Their needs are met exceptionally well through sensitive and targeted use of resources and staff skills. As a result, pupils with additional needs are fully integrated into school, settle quickly and make similar progress to their peers.
- Teachers track pupils' attainment closely, using termly standardised tests. If pupil performance dips in any subject, teachers instigate additional lessons, homework or one-to-one support. This robust and responsive approach ensures that pupils attain highly and above national norms.
- In key stage 4, pupils make good progress, particularly in mathematics, English, history and French. In these subjects, teachers provide interesting opportunities that help pupils to develop their skills and apply these appropriately in different contexts.
- The school provides effective careers guidance. The principal takes responsibility for this aspect. She knows every pupil very well and organises different information events and guidance to help pupils make the right choice. The majority are successful in gaining places at a sixth form college of their choice. Girls told inspectors of their aspirations to be designers, architects and authors.

### **Early years provision**

**Good**

- The early years provision is good and meets all the independent school standards. Adults ensure that children achieve well and develop positive attitudes to learning and good relationships with one another. By the end of the Reception Year, all children reach the expectations of the early learning goals.
- In the Nursery, the use of assessment to gather precise evidence about children's skills is

not embedded as well as it could be. Adults do not always make the most of opportunities to challenge children, resulting in some remaining with the same favourite activities for too long. They are not encouraged to deepen or to extend their learning in other areas.

- Teaching and learning is stronger in the Reception class because adults have a clear understanding of what children can do in readiness for the next stage of their education. Adults' expectations are high. Information from frequent assessments is used well to move learning on; consequently, children's progress is good.
- In both classes, children have positive day-to-day experiences. Adults adapt activities and interactions well to promote children's curiosity and confidence. The classes are well organised and well resourced. Attractive displays celebrate children's work in all areas of the early years foundation stage curriculum.
- The new leader for early years is effective. She supports the team well. Her own practice promoting children's skills in literacy and numeracy, in particular, is highly effective. She plans strategically for further improvements, for example through the introduction of new online assessments.
- Adults establish good relationships with parents. They are encouraged to contribute to assessments of their children's skills and progress.

## School details

Unique reference number	134175
DfE registration number	305/6079
Inspection number	10026292

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	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2½ to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	111
Number of part-time pupils	13
Proprietor	Mr Ali Khan (Alpha Schools Ltd)
Headteacher	Lisa Harries
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,260–£3,995
Telephone number	0208 777 2942
Website	<a href="http://www.wickhamcourt.org.uk">www.wickhamcourt.org.uk</a>
Email address	<a href="mailto:office@wickhamcourt.org">office@wickhamcourt.org</a>
Date of previous inspection	20–21 January 2010

## Information about this school

- Wickham Court School opened in 2002 and it is located in north Kent. It is a non-selective independent day school for girls and boys aged between two and a half and 16 years.
- The school occupies a 15th-century manor house with many historical features protected by English Heritage.
- The school aims to provide small classes and individual attention. The aim on the school website is reflected by the anonymous quotation, 'Anonymity is frequently the enemy of learning.'
- There are 111 pupils on roll, of whom a very small minority have a statement of educational needs and/or disabilities.



- Twenty-six children attend the early years, of whom 22 are in the Nursery and 13 attend part time.
- The school has been part of the Alpha Schools consortium since 2015. Ofsted conducted the last inspection in January 2010.
- Before- and after-school provision is available through the 'Austen Club', which is managed by the school.
- The school website contains the required information.
- The school uses no alternative provision.

## Information about this inspection

- The Department for Education commissioned the inspection that was carried out over two and a half days with one day's notice.
- Inspectors toured the site with school leaders and checked compliance with independent school standards.
- Inspectors visited a range of lessons or parts of lessons in all year groups. Leaders accompanied them on some of these visits. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work and they heard pupils read in lessons.
- Meetings were held with two proprietors, leaders and staff. Inspectors met with two groups of pupils and spoke to them informally throughout the inspection.
- The inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including policies, behaviour records, the single central record, staff files, schemes of work, the strategic plan, risk assessments, health and safety information and pupils' annual reports to parents.
- The school website was assessed prior to the inspection to evaluate its compliance with the provision of the required information for parents, including the school's safeguarding policy.
- Inspectors spoke to parents informally at the start of the day and took account of the 12 responses to Ofsted's online parent survey (Parent View).
- Inspectors considered 24 responses to the staff questionnaire.

## Inspection team

Ann Debono, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Nick Flesher

Ofsted Inspector

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