

Pierview Academy

42–44 Harmer Street, Gravesend, Kent DA12 2AX

Inspection dates

7–9 November 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Despite obvious improvements in the school's overall effectiveness, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment remain too variable, including in the sixth form.
- Leaders have realised that they cannot be certain of how much progress pupils make across a wide range of subjects. Work to tackle this issue is at an early stage.
- Adults are not consistently adept at assessing pupils' progress and using this to provide the right level of challenge. They are not skilful enough at asking the right sort of questions at the right time.
- Leaders provide a range of training for staff, but have not ensured that they know about recent changes to public examinations.
- The school improvement plan includes sensible priorities, but is not precise enough about how and when improvements will be made. The plan does not make clear how leaders will know when they have been successful.
- The balance between leaders' focus on the daily running of the school versus driving the necessary improvements has meant that aspects of the school have not improved as quickly as they could since the last inspection.

The school has the following strengths

- The dedication, care and commitment shown by staff at all levels is heart-warming.
- Following the creation of new leadership and governance roles, the school has begun to move forward with renewed vigour, galvanising the enthusiasm of staff. All independent school standards are met.
- The school provides stability for pupils who usually have had negative, disrupted and disjointed experiences of education.
- In challenging circumstances, the school's considerable success in promoting pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare should not be underestimated.

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?

- Improve the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment so that pupils make good progress academically, by:
 - developing adults' use of questioning
 - making sure adults are sufficiently skilful at assessing pupils' learning and progress
 - using this information to provide pupils with the right level of challenge.
- Increase the impact of leaders and managers on improving the quality of teaching, assessment and pupils' academic progress, by:
 - seeing through work already begun to meaningfully and accurately assess and track pupils' progress over time across a broad range of areas
 - using this to identify and tackle priorities for improvement
 - making improvement plans more specific about what actions are required and by when
 - including measures in the plan to check what difference the actions make to pupils' outcomes
 - ensuring that staff are suitably trained to teach courses that lead to public examinations
 - ensuring that leaders at all levels, including the local management committee, take an active role in making and checking improvements.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Despite the evident and important improvements since the previous inspection, leaders and managers have not secured a good quality of education for pupils.
- Significant changes to the school's work in a number of areas are too recent to have yet made enough difference. Leaders at different levels are realistic and frank about the newness of the many changes that have been made.
- The school improvement plan contains sensible priorities. However, it is too vague about the specific actions that will secure the necessary improvements. The plan lacks precise timings to help keep improvements on track. Also, leaders have not included how they will measure the difference they hope to make to pupils' outcomes to know how much of a success the changes have been.
- Leaders have not systematically surveyed pupils' and parents' opinions about the school for the last two years. Consequently, they do not take full account of their views in shaping improvements. While pupils and parents that spoke with inspectors were positive, the small number of parents that responded to Parent View expressed mixed views.
- Leaders correctly identify that the school's key strengths lie in fostering positive relationships and the successful reintegration to education of pupils with often extremely turbulent pasts. The headteacher conveys an overwhelming sense of care and commitment for pupils that permeates through staff at all levels. He is clearly interested in them as people and works hard to ensure that what the school offers them takes account of their individual interests and aptitudes.
- The senior management team is strongly pupil-focused. Its whole approach centres on considering each individual pupil and shows deep concern for their welfare and well-being. However, senior management meetings are too focused on daily operational matters, without paying enough attention to strategies for improving the overall quality of education.
- The positive ethos of the school is well established. One parent described how 'the atmosphere in the school really suits' her son. Staff are overwhelmingly positive. They are proud to be part of what the school does and what it is trying to achieve next. They are fully on board with the move towards strengthening the quality of teaching and academic rigour within the school, and eager to help secure this improvement.
- Leaders have introduced structured pay scales for staff and a performance management and review system. However, while leaders provide a range of relevant internal and external training for staff, they have not ensured that staff are sufficiently knowledgeable about recent changes to public examinations. Where there have been external checks linked to particular course accreditations, these are very positive.
- The school's 'communication manager', who is a qualified and experienced speech and language therapist, undoubtedly makes a vital contribution to the successful promotion of pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. She follows a clear strategy to ensure that developments to aide pupils' language and communication run increasingly deeply through all levels of the school's work.

- Leaders have begun work to completely overhaul the curriculum. The new curriculum leader has brought expertise and enthusiasm to help the next phase of the school's development. He has rapidly and perceptively formed an accurate view of strengths and areas for improvement. Leaders and staff have achieved success against most of their underlying principles of attendance, routine, relationships, respect and trust. The final one to provide 'high-quality teaching' is at a much earlier stage.
- Staff design programmes and timetables aimed at meeting a broad range of pupils' particular needs. Pupils get a varied, helpful and enriching range of experiences. These opportunities contribute particularly well to pupils' strong personal development. Staff seek an increasing range of suitable accreditation, according to the capability of each pupil, and pupils are able to work towards public examinations. Effective use of a wide range of alternative providers adds significant breadth to what the school can offer.
- Careful and comprehensive planning has gone into the newly developing 'nurturing through nature' project, greatly enhanced by the school's recently acquired allotments. The potential to maximise learning is starting to be unlocked, enabling pupils to understand and experience the whole process from propagation of plants to retail. Working on the community allotment and selling at the market stall provides valuable work experience and fosters positive links with the community.
- The headteacher's pride and passion about the promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is clear to see. He has an extensive knowledge of the rich multicultural community surrounding the school, and uses this well to promote positive British values and challenge the perceptions of some pupils. This drive is paying off. The headteacher is perceptive in his evaluation of the sometimes steady impact of this work, and patient but relentless where some pupils may hold deeply entrenched views.
- Leaders have ensured that all independent school standards are met. The standards are likely to continue to be met if the requested material change is approved by the Department for Education.

Governance

- The school is part of a larger organisation which includes three schools. A newly created post of 'head of schools' came into effect in April 2017, although circumstances at one of the other schools meant that close work with Pierview has only begun since September 2017.
- The proprietor has a realistic understanding of the school's current strengths and required next steps. As the school has evolved, he has wisely strengthened governance through the formation of an executive board and managing director that oversee all three schools, and a local management committee for Pierview.
- The executive board is suitably strategic in its focus. There is evidence of challenge for leaders, particularly where there are reliable statistics to interrogate. This increasing rigour in governance is an important feature in the accelerating pace of improvement. The executive board is making effective use of published best practice materials to refine its work.
- Operationally, the local management committee clearly supports the work of the school and helps it to tick over and function smoothly. Minutes of their meetings show that they do consider progress against the school improvement plan, but this is relatively brief and

focuses on actions completed, rather than the difference this has made. There is limited evidence of challenge of school leaders to secure a better quality of education.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A comprehensive safeguarding policy is in place and readily available on the school's website. It takes careful account of the most recent guidance and makes relevant links with a range of other policies.
- Across the school, staff understand the high priority that is given to voicing concerns about pupils' safety or welfare. The undisputed culture is one of 'no concern is too small to share'. The wide range of regular training and updates for staff means they are vigilant and alert to concerns and know what to do in response. The designated safeguarding leads keep extensive and detailed records, noting clearly the action taken and resulting outcome. The headteacher closely supervises the appropriate sharing of information. Leaders work proactively with parents and a range of other professionals and agencies for the protection of pupils.
- The school's health and safety procedures are thoroughly documented. There are well-established routines for making a wide variety of site checks. This systematic approach contributes to an effective cycle whereby the need for any remedial action is identified, planned for and promptly implemented. Regular fire drills show the speed and efficiency of evacuation improving over time.
- Thorough pre-employment checks for all staff ensure their suitability to work with pupils and vulnerable adults. The single central register meets all requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is too variable. Adults are not consistently adept enough at checking pupils' understanding and progress, or making sure that the degree of academic challenge is right.
- While adults sometimes ask effective questions, for example to help develop the language of particular pupils, questions are often inappropriately simple and closed. Adults do not use questions well enough to develop deep thinking, or explore how well pupils understand the important concepts underneath whatever tasks they are tackling.
- Adults' frequent evaluations of how well pupils are doing during lessons tend to focus largely on their engagement and attitudes, and less frequently on their learning and understanding.
- School leaders have identified correctly that teaching, learning and assessment are not consistently strong enough. They are taking logical action to address this, including through the creation of the new curriculum leader role. Staff are positive about and receptive to the new initiatives.
- Adults are very mindful about pupils' particular needs, personally, socially and emotionally. They put this understanding to good use to engage and motivate pupils. Some adults make similarly effective use of pupils' prior learning to provide a suitable level of academic challenge. Pupils are typically focused and engaged during lesson times.

They mostly respond well to adults' requests.

- Relationships between adults and pupils are extremely positive: they are friendly but suitably respectful. Adults use meaningful praise and reassurance, but are also firm when reasonably required. Pupils are confident that they will get the support they need.
- Support staff know pupils extremely well and judge carefully when to support or intervene and when to step back and allow greater independence. There is a strong sense of teamwork among staff, and pupils are very appreciative of the support that they receive.
- The quality of presentation and organisation of pupils' work files and books is consistently strong. Their written work reflects pupils' positive and active engagement in activities, sometimes including reflections about their learning. Adults' high expectations are readily apparent. They draw well on information technology to illustrate key learning points or support pupils to complete tasks.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils typically join the school having suffered significant disruptions and sometimes considerable gaps in their schooling. Consequently, leaders and staff place a lot of emphasis on breaking down the often-substantial barriers to academic achievement for pupils as an important first step.
- Pupils are very positive about their experiences of this school, particularly in comparison to previous schools. 'There is no bias here and everyone is accepted. We are all equal and have different needs,' was how one pupil expressed it.
- Careers advice is well matched to pupils' individual needs. Productive and regular reviews with a knowledgeable and experienced careers adviser help to keep a close check on the course of action for each pupil.
- Systems for recording and analysing bullying, racist or other incidents involving pupils have recently been improved. Records show that incidents are infrequent. Adults take any concerns seriously and deal with them effectively.
- Leaders have begun to develop a tool to measure and track the success of the school's work to improve pupils' well-being. Work to implement this initiative is well underway, but it is too early to see what it may show.
- Pupils feel safe. Through a combination of assemblies, lessons and formal courses they are taught important ways to keep themselves safe in a diverse range of situations. Leaders are proactive in their work to challenge and tackle any signs of extremist views, including through working with relevant agencies.
- The attendance, well-being and behaviour of pupils that attend alternative provision is tracked closely. Formal provider agreements are in place. Pupils are accompanied to their placements by a school support worker, helping to maintain close links and ensuring that arrangements are successful.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Leaders and staff have developed the school's behaviour management policy, practices and procedures well, according to the school's particular context. Shared aims are clearly expressed and understood by staff. The underpinning beliefs and principles accentuate the promotion of positive behaviour.
- The school has a predominantly calm and purposeful atmosphere. Pupils benefit from the patience and understanding, from both adults and other pupils, which allow them to express themselves. Where pupils' behaviour presents as more challenging, staff are patient, resilient and often successful at defusing situations. Behaviour incidents affecting particular individuals typically decrease well over time.
- The executive board has very recently strengthened the school's policy and practice relating to fixed-term exclusion. Previously, oversight of the school's use of 'cooling off days' was not as tight as it should have been.
- Effective procedures are in place regarding any necessary positive physical handling of pupils. Records show that incidents are rare and are systematically recorded. A suitable format for logging each situation prompts staff to unpick pupils' individual risks and behaviours, including anticipating and avoiding likely triggers.
- Current attendance levels have risen so far this year, following a dip last year. Leaders report their drive to ensure regular attendance was previously hampered by issues with transport for the oldest students. However, leaders' analysis of attendance is not as detailed and incisive as it could be, and current rates remain below available figures for special schools.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Weighing up all available inspection evidence, pupils' progress is not as consistently strong as could reasonably be expected. Even taking full account of pupils' starting points and previously disrupted education, given the school's successful promotion of their personal development and behaviour, pupils could do better with consistently strong teaching. This would further enhance preparations for their futures.
- Leaders cannot reliably demonstrate how much progress pupils are making across a wide range of subjects. Leaders' own analysis of the information that they do have suggests that pupils' academic progress is too variable. A significant minority did not show improvement on their academic scores last year, although potential flaws in the school's method of measuring pupils' progress mean that this may not be a reliable indicator.
- The majority of pupils do make progress with their basic language and mathematical skills. Considering the progress over time of particular individuals, there is clear evidence that they sometimes make big strides in their progress and development.
- Pupils, including the most able, successfully gain an increasing range of accreditations, recognised certifications and public examination passes. Both pupils and staff are rightly proud of this achievement.
- Through the work overseen by the communications manager, pupils make strong progress developing their communication skills. Tightly timed reviews of each pupil's

individual next-step targets show their improvements over time.

Sixth form provision

Requires improvement

- The strengths across the school in the successful promotion of students' personal development, behaviour and welfare, and the relative weaknesses linked to teaching, learning, assessment and the curriculum, also apply to the sixth form.
- The curriculum is determined according to pupils' aptitudes and starting points. Students that may not have achieved recognised qualifications are given opportunity, where appropriate, to continue to work towards these at a suitable level, including in English and mathematics. Due attention is given to the development of vocational and independent-life skills, for example use of public transport, cooking and personal care and welfare.
- Staff draw successfully on positive links with the community, businesses and organisations to provide pupils with a broad range of opportunities for work experience. Those that are not ready, or for whom it is not safe to experience work externally, are catered for with work-related tasks within school.
- There is a multi-layered approach to careers advice. According to each student's stage of development, they visit jobs fairs, listen to outside speakers, and meet individually with an impartial adviser. Staff use their knowledge of students' aptitudes alongside their personal aspirations to decide what may be most helpful.
- Pupils' subsequent destinations once they leave the school's care, sometimes to employment, indicate particular success stories. Leaders have sensible plans to enhance their tracking of students' success in future placements as a way of evaluating the school's effectiveness.

School details

Unique reference number	138408
DfE registration number	886/6139
Inspection number	10012918

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 special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 25
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	25
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Philip Hoppenbrouwers, ASD Learning Ltd
Chair	Ray Waring
Headteacher	Paul Mersh
Annual fees (day pupils)	£26,000–£65,000
Telephone number	020 3137 3630
Website	www.pierviewacademy.co.uk
Email address	paul.mersh@alpschools.org
Date of previous inspection	5–7 June 2013

Information about this school

- This provision was formerly known as ASD Learning Centre – Gravesend.
- Since the previous standard inspection, on 5 to 7 June 2013, the school's registration has changed to provide for up to 25 pupils aged 11 to 25. The school received a progress monitoring inspection in April 2014.
- A range of local authorities place pupils at the school who have been previously permanently excluded or are at risk of permanent exclusion. All pupils have an education,

health and care plan for autistic spectrum disorder or behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Increasingly, pupils' placements at the school are, or become, long term.

- The school makes use of seven alternative providers: North Kent College; Horizons (Tonbridge Centre); Victoria Centre; Art Track (Gravesend); Knight Place Riding School; Archways; and SupaJam (Swanley).
- The school is part of a group of three schools overseen by the same organisation, with one in Welling and another in Leicester. A new head-of-schools role for two of the three schools, including Pierview, was created in April 2017. The post-holder was recruited from outside of the organisation. A new curriculum-leader role has also been created, and the new post-holder joined the school in September 2017.
- Governance arrangements for the school have changed since the previous standard inspection. There is now a local management committee for the school, and an executive board that oversees the work of the three schools. The organisation now also has a managing director.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed a range of individual and small-group lessons across all key stages. One inspector also visited the school's allotments to see the 'nurturing through nature' project. All of these observations were carried out jointly with leaders.
- The inspection team took account of the school's own evaluations of the quality of teaching, adults' assessments of pupils' outcomes and their evaluations of pupils' progress. Inspectors also scrutinised pupils' work.
- Inspectors spoke with a variety of people to gather their views of the school. This included pupils, parents, staff, leaders, the managing director and the proprietor.
- There were only four responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, but inspectors took account of these views. They also analysed 22 confidential questionnaires returned by staff. All of the written comments that were added to these were taken into account alongside other inspection evidence.
- The inspection team observed the work of the school and scrutinised a wide range of documentation relating to the independent school standards, and the quality of education, including a review of the school's website. They considered available reports of the most recent evaluations carried out by placing authorities.
- The Department for Education also commissioned Ofsted to consider the school's application to make a material change to its registration. The application was to increase the school's capacity from 25 to 30.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Sue Bzikot

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Raising concerns and making a complaint about Ofsted', which is available from Ofsted's website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/complaints-about-ofsted. If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

Parent View

You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when and as part of the inspection.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk, or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at www.gov.uk/ofsted.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2017